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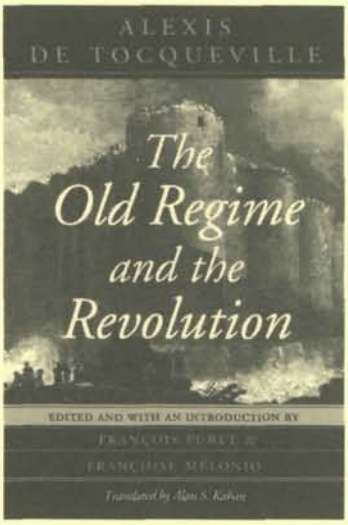

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Life is our dictionary.
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The Story of a Poisoning

Twenty-two years ago, in celebration of the American bicentennial, the historian Peter Gay contributed an essay to The American Scholar called "At Home in America." A friend had asked him, in passing, "And do you feel at home in America?" Gay wrote: "It took me aback, not because I found the question impertinent but because I thought the answer obvious. Of course I was at home in America. And it seemed to me at that moment, as it does now, that this categorical and confident reply was a tribute far less to my adaptability than to the country that had permitted me to offer it without a moment's hesitation."

Gay had arrived in the United States, via Havana, in 1941, as a seventeen-year-old refugee named Peter Fröhlich. More than fifty years passed before he was ready to write *My German Question: Growing Up in Nazi Berlin,* the scalding memoir from which his essay in this issue is adapted. Yale University Press is publishing the book this fall.

Gay calls his memoir "the story of a poisoning." Did the process of writing it supply an antidote? "No," he says. "The antidote was the passage of years, spending time in Germany, having German friends. The book provided no catharsis whatsoever. In fact, I hate the word. There's the famous example of the novelist Theodor Fontane. When he was in his seventies"—the same age as Gay—"he was depressed and certain that he was written out. His doctor told him to write his autobiography. He did, and afterwards he felt fine. Nothing like that happened to me." It didn't have to. It is hard to imagine a writer less written out than Peter Gay, who, in addition to directing the Center for Scholars and Writers at the New York Public Library, is currently working on two speeches, two articles (one in English, one in German), and his twenty-fourth book.

"Whenever I go back to Berlin," he says, "I take an obligatory walk past the houses I used to live in. People like to think that when you see your old home you break down in tears, but I just get mad. There's no closure—another horrible word! I prefer the phrase 'to be continued.' I don't want to be closed; I want to be open."

The American Scholar has a new address: 1785 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Fourth Floor, Washington, D.C. 20036.

A. F.

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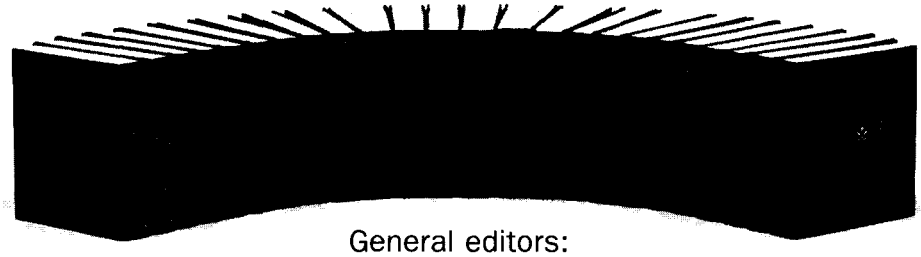

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AT LARGE
AND
AT SMALL

I Scream, You Scream

PHILONOË

I read last March that the town council of Stafford, New Jersey, had passed an ordinance stating: "At no time shall a vendor be permitted to use a sound device, mechanical bell, mechanical music, mechanical noise, speakers, amplifiers, or any other similar type of sound device." The target was ice cream trucks, whose peripatetic tootles the council wished to classify with the roar of jets and the blast of car alarms. As a child in suburban Connecticut, I had always considered the purl of the Good Humor truck to be more closely akin to a cricket's chirp or the sound of summer rain: a seasonal gift, wreathed in sweet associations. I was therefore heartened to read, in May, that Jeffery Cabaniss, the owner of Jef-Freeze Treats, had successfully challenged the constitutionality of Stafford's anti-tootle law in federal court. Mr. Cabaniss's only concession was to change his truck's melody from "Turkey in the Straw," which had particularly vexed the residents of Stafford, to the less familiar, and thus presumably less irksome, "Music Box Dancer."

The *New York Times* called Mr. Cabaniss a "First Amendment hero." I didn't give a fig about the Constitution. I cared about the contents of Mr. Cabaniss's truck. As far as I was concerned, a vote against Jef-Freeze Treats was a vote against ice cream, and a vote against ice cream—even against Klondike Krunch Bars and Power Ranger Pops, which constitute the heart of the Cabaniss inventory—was a vote against the pursuit of happiness.

I recently calculated (assuming an average consumption of one pint of ice cream per week, at 1,000 calories per pint, and the American Medical Association's reckoning of 3,500 calories per pound of stored body fat) that had I eaten no ice cream since the age of eighteen, I would currently weigh minus 416 pounds. I might be buoyant, but I would be miserable. Before I was married, I frequently took a pint of Häagen-Dazs Chocolate Chocolate Chip to bed, with four layers of paper towels wrapped around the container to prevent digital hypothermia. (The Nutrition Facts on the side of the carton define a "serving size" as a quarter of a pint, but that's like calling a serving size of Pringles a single potato chip). Now, under the watchful eye of a husband so virtuous that he actually prefers low-fat frozen yogurt, I go through the motions of scooping a modest hemisphere of ice cream into a small bowl, but we both know that during the course of the evening I will simply shuttle to and from the freezer until the entirety of the pint has been transferred from carton to bowl to me. An important incentive for writing this essay was that during its composition this process was not called greed; it was called research.

My favorite flavors are all variations on chocolate, vanilla, coffee, and nuts, none of which is good for you. I do not like fruit flavors. They are insufficiently redolent of sin. Strawberry ripple is the top of a slippery slope at the bottom of which lie such nouvelle atrocities, recently praised in the *New York Times*, as tofu-anise, cardamom, white pepper, and corn ice creams. *Corn?* Why not Brussels sprouts? (I shouldn't say that too loudly, lest the Ohio State University Department of Dairy Technology, which has created sauerkraut sherbet and potatoes-and-bacon ice cream, derive inspiration for a new recipe.) On the other hand, ice cream shouldn't actually kill you. When I called the Häagen-Dazs Consumer Relations Department a few days ago to verify the butterfat content of Mint Chip, I was alarmed to hear the following after-hours message: "If you have a medical emergency with one of our products that requires immediate attention, please call Poison Control at 612-347-2101." What medical

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emergency could a few scoops of ice cream precipitate? It is true that circa 400 B.C., Hippocrates, or one of the anonymous writers who were later known as Hippocrates, warned that snow-chilled beverages might "suddenly throw . . . the body into a different state than it was before, producing thereby many ill effects." It is also true that in 1997 the *British Medical Journal* noted that "ice cream headaches" can be produced by cold temperatures on the back of the palate, which stimulate the spheno-palatine ganglion to dilate blood vessels in the brain. However, the article concluded with the heartening sentence, "Ice cream abstinence is not indicated."

As I have said, I take a dim view of healthful ice cream, and was thus cheered to learn from a spokeswoman at the International Dairy Foods Association that sales of high-fat ice cream are going up and sales of low-fat ice cream are going down. Had I lived in eighteenth-century Naples, however, I might have softened my anti-salubrity stance. According to Filippo Baldini, a physician who wrote a 1775 treatise on the medicinal properties of *Sorbetti o Gelati,* cinnamon ices are an efficacious remedy for diarrhea; coffee ices for indigestion; pine-nut ices for consumption; ass's milk ices for maladies of the blood; cow's milk ices for paralysis; and sheep's milk ices for hemorrhages, scurvy, and emaciation. This pharmacopoeia sounds right up my alley. In fact, if Dr. Baldini were practicing today, I would add my name to his patient rolls without delay. "Looking a little emaciated, Philonoë," he'd say. "Here's a prescription for Ben & Jerry's New York Super Fudge Chunk. BlueCross BlueShield will reimburse in full."

Although very cold ice cream numbs the taste buds that perceive sweetness (the basis for the entreaty that used to adorn cartons of Häagen-Dazs: "Please temper to a soft consistency to achieve the full flavor bouquet"), I prefer my ice cream untempered. I also like it even better in the winter than in the summer. Seasonal Good Humor trucks notwithstanding, it is a grave error to assume that ice cream consumption requires hot weather. If that were the case, wouldn't Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield have established their first ice cream parlor in Tallahassee instead of Burlington, Vermont, which averages 161 annual days of frost? (Ben explains his product's winter popularity by means of the Internal-External Temperature Differential and Equalization Theory, whereby, he claims, the consumption of cold foodstuffs in freezing weather reduces the difference between the internal body temperature and the ambient air temperature, thus making his customers feel comparatively warm.) Wouldn't John Goddard, an outdoorsman of my acquaintance, have arranged for a thermos of hot chicken soup instead of a half gallon of French vanilla ice cream with raspberry topping to be airdropped to him on the summit of Mount Rainier? And wouldn't the Nobel Prize banquet, held every year in Stockholm on the tenth of December, conclude with *crêpes Suzette* instead of *glace Nobel?* As the lights dim, a procession of uniformed servitors marches down the grand staircase, each bearing on a silver salver a large cake surrounded by spun sugar. Projecting from the cake is a dome of ice cream. Projecting from the dome is an obelisk of ice cream. Projecting from the obelisk is a flame. When the laureates—who have already consumed the likes of *homard en gelée à la crème de choux fleur et au caviar de Kalix* and *ballotine de pintade avec sa garniture de pommes de terre de Laponie* with no special fanfare—see what is heading their way, they invariably burst into applause.

The Greek grammarian Athenaeus tells a catty story about Diphilus, an Athenian dramatist who lived in the fourth century B.C.:

> Once upon a time Diphilus was invited to Gnathaena's house, to dine, so they say, in celebration of the festival of Aphrodite. . . . And one of her lovers, a stranger from Syria, had sent her some snow . . . the snow was to be secretly shaken up in the unmixed wine; then she directed the slave to pour out about a pint and offer the cup to Diphilus. Overjoyed, Diphilus quickly drank out of the cup, and overcome by the surprising effect he cried, "I swear, Athena and the gods bear me witness, Gnathaena, that your wine-cellar is indubitably cold." And she replied, "Yes, for we always take care to pour in the prologues of your plays."

When the prologues of Diphilus were unavailable, the ancient Greeks and Romans, who

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had borrowed the trick from the Middle East, sometimes chilled their drinks with ice and snow. The ice, which was cut in winter from ponds and streams, and the snow, which was carried from mountaintops, were stored underground in straw-lined pits. If the pits were sufficiently well insulated, their contents could remain frozen throughout the summer.

By the seventeenth century, rich Florentines were so addicted to cold drinks that, in a poem called *Bacco in Toscano,* Francesco Redi called snow "the fifth element":

> He is mad who without snow
> Thinks to receive a satisfied guest.
> Bring then from Vallombrosa
> Snow in God's plenty. . . .
> And bring me ice
> From the grotto under the Boboli hill.
> With long picks
> With great poles
> Shatter
> crush
> crunch
> crack, chip
> Until all resolves
> In finest iciest powder, . . .

Redi also mentioned something called *pappina,* a semisolid dessert made from snow beaten with fruit juices or other flavorings. However, as the late British food writer Elizabeth David observed in *Harvest of the Cold Months: A Social History of Ice and Ices,* "Ice-diluted and ice-cooled sherbets do not . . . equate with frozen sherbets any more than putting a few pieces of ice into a glass of drinking water turns that water into ice, or than the milk half-frozen in the bottle on your doorstep on an icy morning has become ice-cream."

It has long been believed that *real* sherbets and ice creams—desserts that were artificially frozen by submerging their containers in icy brine or other refrigerants—were introduced to France in the sixteenth century by Catherine de Medici, the wife of Henry II, who brought the recipes from Italy. In her 1861 British domestic bible called *The Book of Household Management,* Isabella Beeton declared this contribution to French cuisine so invaluable that Catherine should be forgiven the Massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day. Elizabeth David pooh-poohs the Catherine story. *She* thinks the Italians did not figure out how to make ice cream until the seventeenth century and that the first French ices were made around 1660 by a distiller named Audiger. This is Audiger's recipe for *cresme glacée:*

> Take a *chopine* [16 oz.] of milk, a half *septier* [8 oz.] of good sweet cream, or else three *poissons* [12 oz.], with six or seven ounces of sugar & a half spoonful of Orange flower water, then put it in a tin or earthenware or other vessel to freeze it. . . . Put three, four, or six containers or other vessels according to their size in a tub, at one finger's distance each from the other, then you take the ice, which you pound well, and salt it when it is pounded, and promptly put it in the tub. . . . When all is thus arranged you leave it for half an hour. . . . Then you move the ice covering your boxes and stir the liquor with a spoon so that it freezes into a snow.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Italians were believed to make the best frozen desserts. (Many people still hold this opinion, including a friend of mine who, on a recent visit to Sicily, was told by some local friends that they wished him to experience a "traditional Catania breakfast." He had lugubrious visions of pasta heaped with eggplant. However, the breakfast, served at an elegant café, turned out to be *granita di caffè con panna:* an espresso-flavored quasi-sherbet topped with whipped cream.) In 1778, a Benedictine monk in Apulia published recipes for ices and ice creams flavored with coffee, chocolate, cinnamon, candied eggs, chestnuts, pistachios, almonds, fennel seeds, violets, jasmine, pears, lemons, oranges, strawberries, peaches, apricots, bitter cherries, melons, watermelons, pomegranates, and muscatel grapes. In Victorian Britain, the duke of Beaufort employed a Neapolitan confectioner who invented a new *sorbetto* (the flavor, unfortunately, is not recorded), a feat so momentous that it warranted waking His Grace in the middle of the night to tell him the good news.

On the other side of the Atlantic, the earliest record of ice cream dates to 1700. The man who ate it, at the home of the governor of Maryland, described it as "Delicious." His tastes were shared by George Washington, who owned two pewter ice cream pots, and Thomas

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Jefferson, who developed his own eighteen-step recipe. It was not until after James Madison became president in 1809, however, that ice cream realized its full ceremonial potential. A White House guest wrote:

> Mrs. Madison always entertains with Grace and Charm, but last night there was a sparkle in her eye that set astir an Air of Expectancy among her Guests. When finally the brilliant Assemblage—America's best—entered the dining room, they beheld a Table set with French china and English silver, laden with good things to eat, and in the Centre high on a silver platter, a large, shining dome of pink Ice Cream.

After that historic moment, was it not inevitable that in 1921, the commissioner of Ellis Island should decree that all newly arrived immigrants be served ice cream as part of their first American meal?

Americans now eat more ice cream per capita than the citizens of any other nation, and I am proud to say that from an early age I have worked hard to do my part for my country. I fixed the starting date of my own ice cream calculus at age eighteen because that marked the beginning of the period when I could consume my favorite food ad libitum. However, a substantial fraction of my pre-adult self was also made up of cream, milk, sugar, egg yolks, vanilla extract, and carrageenan (a natural stabilizer made from *Chondrus crispus*, a cartilaginous red algae that is harvested with long rakes from intertidal rocks along the North Atlantic).

Although partial to Toasted Almond Good Humors, I was aware, even as a very young child, that the kingdom of ice cream contains an exquisite haut monde as well as an affable proletariat. On special occasions, my parents would arrive home from New York City bearing a lavender box, swathed in dry ice, from Louis Sherry, in which reposed a frozen confection called Mocha Praliné. O vanished love of my youth! What I would give for a taste of it now! Shaped like a birthday cake, Mocha Praliné was made of coffee ice cream decorated with fluted extrusions of whipped cream *(frozen* whipped cream, which gently resisted the tooth rather than squishing) and embedded with Tootsie Roll–sized logs of hazelnut-impregnated chocolate fudge. The logs were faintly gritty in texture and—there is no other way to describe them—excremental in color and shape. Who knows what regressive satisfactions, what thrillingly broken taboos, were bound up in their consumption?

When I was eight, we moved to Los Angeles, where Mocha Praliné was unavailable and my brother and I were consequently morose. Our mother, to her everlasting credit, attempted to console us by frequently taking us to lunch at Blum's. Lunch was a chocolate milkshake. Period. (Although on other occasions she touted the merits of raw carrots and whole wheat bread, our mother was wise enough to recognize that if you drank an entire milkshake—the contents of the soda glass *plus* the contents of the metal shaker—you would hardly touch your hamburger anyway, so why order one?) As teenagers, we favored bowls of Baskin-Robbins Chocolate Mint (the color of fly-specked absinthe), which we bought by the half-gallon, carried home on our bicycles, and excavated with a spade large enough to dig a grave.

My brother is two years my senior. In the interest of nomenclatural symmetry, he suggested that he be referred to in these pages as Philogelato, but his real name is Kim. In the fall of 1974, en route from California to our college in Boston, Kim and I decided to conduct a transcontinental ice cream tasting. We plotted our zigzag journey on a huge map, basing our ports of call on the recommendations of friends, and as we sampled each shop's wares, assigning them a rating ranging between one and three ice cream cones. Starting at McConnell's in Santa Barbara (three cones), we pressed on to Snelgrove in Salt Lake City (two cones); Platte Valley Creamery in Scottsbluff, Nebraska (two and a half cones); Snowbird Frozen Custard in Indianapolis (one and a half cones); Ohio State University Creamery in Columbus (one and a half cones); and Bailey's in Cambridge (two cones). As you can see, it was all downhill after McConnell's, the sanctum sanctorum of ice cream: a shrine so beneficent that it served two kinds of vanilla (with and without specks), two kinds of chocolate (milk and bittersweet), and two kinds of coffee (smooth and peppered with ground espresso beans, samples of which an undeserv-

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ing customer once Scotch-taped to a letter that said, "WHAT THE HELL IS THIS STUFF IN MY ICE CREAM?").

Fifteen years later, when my husband and I got married, it was a foregone conclusion—at least on my part—that ice cream would play an important role in the ceremonies. At our rehearsal dinner, our New York City loft was filled with the strange grinding noises of three hand-crank ice cream makers, each of which, under Kim's supervision, produced five quarts: vanilla, coffee, and mint chocolate chip. George and I gave the other members of the wedding party engraved silver pens; Kim received an engraved silver ice cream scoop.

My brother and his scoop now reside in Jackson, Wyoming. Although Kim works as a mountaineering guide, leads kayak expeditions, plays jazz recorder, teaches courses on snow morphology and the aerodynamics of bird flight, takes nature photographs, and manages a small investment fund, I think of him primarily as Wyoming's Emperor of Ice Cream.

Every few months, under the auspices of Central Wyoming College, Kim offers a class on the physics and chemistry of ice cream making. Have you ever wondered why homemade ice cream requires a mixture of ice and salt between the tub and the canister? Answer: salt lowers the freezing point of water by pushing apart the crystal lattice of ice, drawing the energy needed for this disruption by stealing heat from the ice cream mix. If there were no salt packed around the ice cream canister to cool the melting ice below 32 degrees, the mix, which freezes at around 27 degrees, would remain liquid even if you cranked for a hundred years.

Aside from the ingredients, what are the two most important variables in ice cream production? Answer: butterfat, which should be high, and overrun, which should be low. Ice cream must legally have a butterfat content of least 10 percent; Ben & Jerry's has 15 percent; McConnell's has 17 percent (and formerly had 22 percent, but too many customers complained that, post-sundae, the roofs of their mouths felt waxy). Overrun is the proportion of air whipped into the mix while it freezes. The cheapest commercial ice cream, which has 100 percent overrun, is half air and has the consistency of frozen shaving cream; McConnell's has 15 percent overrun and the consistency of ambrosia. Kim likes to reduce the overrun of Breyer's Coffee, which he rates excellent in flavor but excessively fluffy in texture, by placing a few scoops in a plastic bag and smashing them with a meat-tenderizing mallet. ("How often do you do this?" I asked. "Always!" he answered. "Why eat all that air when it's so easy to get it out?")

What makes the mix turn into a scoopable mush rather than a greasy ice cube? Answer: the combination of cold and agitation, which can be accomplished in a commercial ice cream freezer, an electric home ice cream maker, a hand-cranker, or the back of a B-17 bomber. According to a 1943 *New York Times* article Kim is fond of quoting, American airmen stationed in Britain "place prepared ice-cream mixture in a large can and anchor it to the rear gunner's compartment of a Flying Fortress. It is well shaken up and nicely frozen by flying over enemy territory at high altitudes."

Alternatively, you can use liquid nitrogen. Kim's ice-cream-making technique underwent a revolution a decade ago, after a geology expedition in Yellowstone with two friends—one the daughter of the *pâtissier* to the king of Denmark, the other a geochronologist from U.C. Berkeley. As they were climbing Dunraven Pass, Kim mentioned—somehow it seemed apropos—that he had never been able to make a perfect homemade ice cream because the mix took about half an hour to freeze, during which time its ice crystals grew, through the process of melt-freeze metamorphosis, to a larger than optimal size. The geochronologist, whose name was Garniss Curtis, commented that a colder refrigerant would freeze the mix faster.

"I've tried dry ice bubbling in alcohol," said Kim. "It was a mess."

"No," said Professor Curtis. "I mean *really* cold. Dry ice is only minus 107 Fahrenheit. Liquid nitrogen is minus 320."

Kim returned to Jackson Hole and took a large thermos bottle to the local sperm bank, which uses liquid nitrogen to preserve its merchandise. "Young man," said the director, eyeing the thermos, "that's quite a contribution." Kim explained that he wished to make a withdrawal, not a deposit. He took home a liter of liquid nitrogen and became an instant convert.

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In the brave new world of nitro, no ice cream maker, either hand-crank or electric, is necessary. If the ice cream mix has been pre-chilled in a kitchen freezer, liquid nitrogen freezes it so fast that one needs only a metal pot and a metal stirring spoon (glass or plastic would shatter). I have witnessed the process, which can justly be described as Macbethian. Because liquid nitrogen boils at 320 degrees below zero, when it comes into contact with warm air and is forced to change from a liquid to a gas, it seethes and steams like water in a spaghetti pot.

Although Kim has created many more complex recipes, the following ultra-simple one is my favorite. I'm not sure you should try it at home.

Kim's Kahlúa Coffee Liquid Nitrogen Ice Cream

1. Mix one pint half-and-half and one pint heavy cream.
2. Stir in several teaspoons instant coffee, to taste.
3. Stir in sugar to taste (at least one cup: remember that because cold desensitizes sweet-sensitive taste buds, frozen ice cream will taste less sweet than mix).
4. Stir in Kahlúa to taste (at least two tablespoons).
5. Chill mix in kitchen freezer for about forty minutes, until small ice crystals begin to form around periphery.
6. Pour one inch of mix into large metal kitchen pot with insulated handle.
7. Ask friend with steady hands and thick gloves to hold handle.
8. Put on goggles and gloves.
9. Slowly pour liquid nitrogen from Dewar flask into pot while stirring mix vigorously with metal spoon, continuously scraping freezing mix off interior of pot. Liquid nitrogen will freeze flesh as well as ice cream. Watch where you pour.
10. Resist temptation to pour in big slug all at once. This creates spectacular mushroom cloud but freezes ice cream to texture of fossilized Rice Krispies.
11. When mix is stiff but not brittle, stop pouring. Wait until bubbling and hissing stop. If you eat ice cream before liquid nitrogen turns to vapor, you will suffer frostbite of the throat.

Kim has never suffered frostbite of the throat, though he did once suffer frostbite of the toes when he splashed a few minus-320-degree drops on his bare feet. However, in defense of liquid nitrogen, he hastens to mention that his only ice cream near-fatality occurred in connection with an old-fashioned hand-cranker in his pre-nitro days.

He was on a river trip in the Grand Canyon. Because he was one of the organizers, he had been able to conceal in the food supplies, without the knowledge of the other paddlers, a five-quart ice cream maker, a large sack of rock salt, and an insulated picnic chest containing several bags of ice and the ingredients for hand-cranked coffee ice cream. On the fifth morning of the trip, with his tent neatly stuffed and his gear stowed, he found himself waiting impatiently on the riverbank for the other expedition members to get ready. After an hour, he threw the ice cream ingredients into his kayak, threaded the rope of his quick-release rescue rig through the drain hole of the ice cream maker, and set off down the Colorado River.

Paddling alone in the Grand Canyon is a bad idea. Paddling alone in the Grand Canyon with a five-quart ice cream maker strapped to the back deck of your kayak is a *very* bad idea. In the middle of Nankoweap Rapid, a wave broke over the stern, filled the tub of the ice cream maker, and tipped Kim over. Normally, he would easily have performed an Eskimo roll, a way of bracing the paddle against the water in order to turn an upside-down kayak right side up. However, the weight and drag of the water-filled tub created so much resistance that he was unable to roll.

Zooming through the rapid upside down, his head underwater, Kim thought, "Ice cream is going to be the death of me."

Finally, with a huge effort, he managed to roll the kayak on the fourth try, and paddled to a nearby sandbar.

Half an hour later, the rest of the expedition floated around the bend. As one of its members recently recalled, "There sat Kim in the 120-degree sun, as calm as Buddha, cranking the handle of a gigantic ice cream maker."

"Were you angry that he'd taken off without the rest of you?" I asked.

"Not after the first spoonful."

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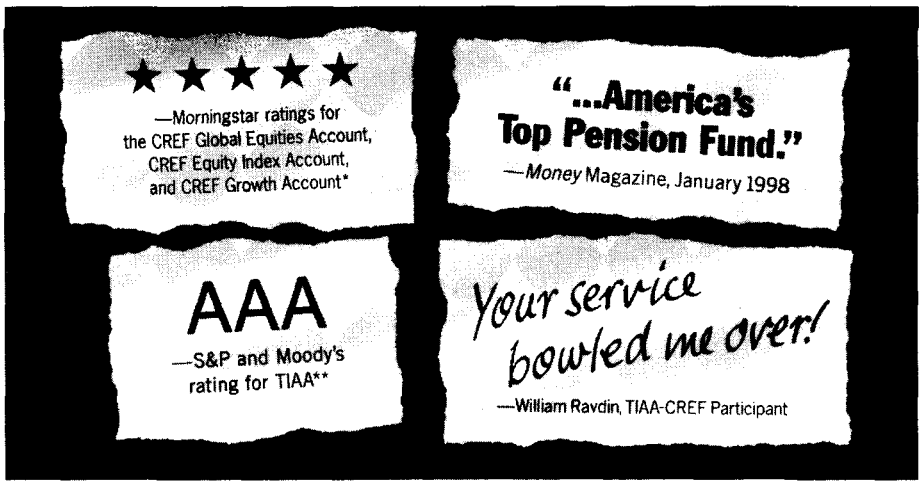

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What is more essential for an orator than his voice? Nonetheless, no one who aspires to eloquence will, on my advice, become a slave to his voice, the way Greek actors do, who for years at a time practice declamation sitting down, and who daily, before they speak in public, gradually warm up the voice while lying in bed, and then, after performing, sit down and take their voices from the highest notes back down to the lowest and so in some fashion or other recuperate. If *we* did that, our clients would lose their cases before we had recited our paean or chant the prescribed number of times.

—CICERO
De Oratore, *55 B.C.*

He was more than six feet in height, and his majestic form, as he rose to speak, straight as an arrow, muscular, yet lithe and graceful, his flashing eye, and more than all, his voice, that rivalled Webster's in its richness, and in the depth and sonorousness of its cadences, made up such an ideal of an orator as the listeners never forgot.

—DAVID N. JOHNSON
on hearing Frederick Douglass speak, Cork, Ireland, 1845

It is at such moments that philosophy and party programs fall away, and one reaches beyond the narrow confines of human capacities to become a preacher, an apostle, a crier of battle. At that moment the soul of the German worker is in my hands and I can feel that it is soft as wax.

—JOSEPH GOEBBELS
on speaking to crowds, 1936

No deaf child who has earnestly tried to speak the words which he has never heard—to come out of the prison of silence, where no tone of love, no song of bird, no strain of music ever pierces the stillness—can forget the thrill of surprise, the joy of discovery which came over him when he uttered his first word. Only such a one can appreciate the eagerness with which I talked to my toys, to stones, trees, birds and dumb animals, or the delight I felt when at my call Mildred ran to me or my dogs obeyed my commands. It is an unspeakable boon to be able to speak in winged words that need no interpretation.

—HELEN KELLER
on learning to talk, 1890

He confirms an observation of mine, which indeed I find is hundreds of years old, that a stammering man is never a worthless one. Physiology can tell you why. It is an excess of delicacy, excess of sensibility to the presence of his fellow-creature, that makes him stammer.

—THOMAS CARLYLE
Letter to Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1843, on Henry James's stammer

Other people—their eyes, their desires, their voiced and unvoiced opinions, their harbored secrets—make an atmosphere too oppressively rich, too busy; my sensation, when I stutter, is that I am trying, with the machete of my face, to hack my way through a jungle of other minds' thrusting vines and tentacles. Or, sometimes, it is as if I have, hurrying to the end of my spoken sentence, carefully picked and plotted my way out of a room full of obstacles, and, having almost attained (stealthily, cunningly) the door, I trip, calling painful attention to myself and spilling all the beans.

—JOHN UPDIKE
on his stuttering, 1989

When they heard this sound a crowd quickly collected and were completely bewildered because each of them heard these men speaking in his own language. They were absolutely amazed and said in their astonishment, "Listen, surely all these speakers are Galileans? Then how does it happen that every one of us can hear the particular language he has known since a child? There are Parthians, Medes, and Elamites; there are men whose homes are in Mesopotamia, in Judaea and Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia,

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Egypt, and the parts of Libya near Cyrene, as well as visitors from Rome! There are Jews and proselytes, men from Crete and men from Arabia, yet we can all hear these men speaking of the glorious works of God in our native language!"

Everyone was utterly amazed and did not know what to make of it. Indeed they kept saying to each other, "What on earth can this mean?"

But there were others who laughed mockingly and said, "These fellows have drunk too much sweet wine!"

—THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES
Chapter 2 (J. B. Phillips translation), c.66 A.D.

"Yes," I said, "it's a hell of a day." A portly old man standing a few feet up the bar gave a grunt, abruptly put down his beer glass, turned to me, and said, "My boy, a profane word never yet had any effect on the weather. . . . Well, I tell you, it might not be one-hundred-per-cent profanity, but it's a leader-on. You start out with 'hell,' 'devil take it,' 'Dad burn it,' 'Gee whiz,' and the like of that, and by and by you won't be able to open your trap without letting loose an awful, awful blasphemous oath. It's like the cocaine dope habit. I know. I talked real rough myself when I was a young squirt, but I had the mother wit to quit. I haven't uttered a solitary profane word since a Sunday morning in the winter of 1886. I was running to catch a ferry boat and I got left, and let an oath out of me so awful I broke down and cried like a baby."

—JOSEPH MITCHELL
"The Don't Swear Man," 1940

In those two Miles he broached a thousand things—let me see if I can give you a list—Nightingales, Poetry—on Poetical Sensation—Metaphysics—Different genera and species of Dreams . . . —Monsters—the Kraken—Mermaids—Southey believes in them—Southey's belief too much diluted—a Ghost story—Good morning—I heard his voice as he came towards me—I heard it as he moved away—I had heard it all the interval—if it may be called so.

—JOHN KEATS
Letter to George and Georgiana Keats, April 15, 1819, on walking with Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Once you got over the high-pitched voice, why, you didn't think about it, really. It was not your everyday Garden City talk. The things he said were from another world, and they were fascinating for us. It was a right pleasant day.

—DOLORES HOPE
on talking with Truman Capote in Garden City, Kansas, 1960, as he researched In Cold Blood

Watching him, hearkening to him, while he stood there unmistakably before his audience, on the raised platform, in the glare of the gas-burners shining down upon him from behind the pendant screen immediately above his head, his individuality, so to express it, altogether disappeared. . . . We were as conscious, as though we saw them, of the bald head, the spectacles, and the little gaiters of Mr. Pickwick—of the snuffy tones, the immense umbrella, and the voluminous bonnet and gown of Mrs. Gamp—of the belcher necktie, the mother-of-pearl buttons and the coloured waistcoat of the voluble Cheap Jack—of Little Paul's sweet face and gentle accents—of the one eye and the well-known pair of Wellingtons, adorning the head and legs of Mr. Wackford Squeers—of Sam's imperturbable nonchalance—and of Mr. Peggotty's hearty, briny, sou'-wester of a voice and general demeanor!

—CHARLES KENT
Charles Dickens as a Reader, *1872*

Eventually my turn came, and the words that I had written in silence . . . unfolded themselves like lawn chairs in my mouth and emerged one by one wearing large Siberian hats of consonants and long erminous vowels and landed softly, without visible damage, here and there in the audience, and I thought, Gosh, I'm reading aloud, from Chapter Seven!

—NICHOLSON BAKER
on his first public reading, 1993

Q: Every time I see Julia Child, television's "French Chef," she seems to be out of breath. Does she suffer from asthma or emphysema? —H.B., Everett, Mass.

A: Miss Child's response is that her lungs are healthy. The art of cooking is a labor of love and involves a lot of manual labor. Try whipping a soufflé some time.

—*Query in* The Boston Globe, *1966*

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The Impious Impatience of Job

CYNTHIA OZICK

The riddles of God are more satisfying than the solutions of men.

—G. K. Chesterton

Twenty-five centuries ago (or perhaps twenty-four or twenty-three), an unnamed Hebrew poet took up an old folktale and transformed it into a sacred hymn so sublime—and yet so shocking to conventional religion—that it agitates and exalts us even now. Scholars may place the Book of Job in the age of the Babylonian Exile, following the conquest of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar—but to readers of our own time, or of any time, the historicity of this timeless poem hardly matters. It is timeless because its author intended it so; it is timeless the way Lear on the heath is timeless (and Lear may owe much to Job). Job is a man who belongs to no known nation; despite his peerless Hebrew speech, he is plainly not a Hebrew. His religious customs are unfamiliar, yet he is no pagan: he addresses the One God of monotheism. Because he is unidentified by period or place, nothing in his situation is foreign or obsolete; his story cannot blunder into anachronism or archaism. Like almost no other primordial poem the West has inherited, the Book of Job is conceived under the aspect of the universal—if the universal is understood to be a questioning so organic to our nature that no creed or philosophy can elude it.

That is why the striking discoveries of scholars—whether through philological evidence or through the detection of infusions from surrounding ancient cultures—will not deeply unsettle the common reader. We are driven—we common readers—to approach Job's story with tremu-

Cynthia Ozick's most recent work of fiction is *The Puttermesser Papers*. She is currently serving as guest editor of Houghton Mifflin's *Best American Essays 1998*. This essay will appear as the introduction to *The Book of Job*, to be published this winter in the Vintage Spiritual Classics series.

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lous palms held upward and unladen. Not for us the burden of historical linguistics, or the torrent of clerical commentary that sweeps through the centuries, or the dusty overlay of partisan interpretation. Such a refusal of context, historical and theological, is least of all the work of willed ignorance; if we choose to turn from received instruction, it is rather because of an intrinsic knowledge—the terror, in fact, of self-knowledge. Who among us has not been tempted to ask Job's questions? Which of us has not doubted God's justice? What human creature ever lived in the absence of suffering? If we, ordinary clay that we are, are not equal to Job in the wild intelligence of his cries, or in the unintelligible wilderness of his anguish, we are, all the same, privy to his conundrums.

Yet what captivates the scholars may also captivate us. A faithful English translation, for instance, names God as "God," "the Lord," "the Holy One," "the Almighty"—terms reverential, familiar, and nearly interchangeable in their capacity to evoke an ultimate Presence. But the author of Job, while aiming for the same effect of incalculable awe, has another resonance in mind as well: the dim tolling of some indefinable aboriginal chime, a suggestion of immeasurable antiquity. To achieve this, he is altogether sparing in his inclusion of the Tetragrammaton, the unvocalized YHVH—the root of which is "to be," rendered as "I am that I am"—which chiefly delineates God in the Hebrew Bible (and was later approximately transliterated as Yahweh or Jehovah). Instead, he sprinkles his poem, cannily and profusely, with pre-Israelite God-names: El, Eloah, Shaddai—names so lost in the long-ago, so unembedded in usage, that the poem is inevitably swept clean of traditional pieties. Translation veils the presence—and the intent—of these old names; and the necessary seamlessness of translation will perforce paper over the multitude of words and passages that are obscure in the original, subject to philological guesswork. Here English allows the common reader to remain untroubled by scholarly puzzles and tangles.

But how arresting to learn that Satan appears in the story of Job not as that demonic figure of later traditions whom we meet in our translation but as *ha-Satan,* with the definite article attached, meaning "the Adversary"—the counter-arguer among the angels, who is himself one of "the sons of God." Satan's arrival in the tale helps date its composition. It is under Persian influence that he turns up—via Zoroastrian duality, which pits, as equal contenders, a supernatural power for Good against a supernatural power for Evil. In the Book of Job, the scholars tell us, Satan enters Scripture for the first time as a distinct personality and as an emblem of destructive forces. But note: when the tale moves out of the prose of its fablelike frame into the sovereign grandeur of its poetry, Satan evaporates; the poet, an uncompromising monotheist, recognizes no alternative to the Creator, and no opposing might. Nor does the poet acknowledge any concept of afterlife, though Pharisaic thought in the

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period of his writing is just beginning to introduce that idea into normative faith.

There is much more that textual scholarship discloses in its search for the Job-poet's historical surround: for example, the abundance of words and phrases in Aramaic, a northwestern Semitic tongue closely related to Hebrew, which was rapidly becoming the lingua franca of the ancient Near East. Aramaic is significantly present in other biblical books as well: in the later Psalms, in Ecclesiastes, Esther, and Chronicles—and, notably, in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Babylonian Talmud is written in Aramaic; it is the language that Jesus speaks. Possibly the Job-poet's everyday speech is Aramaic—this may account for his many Aramaisms—but clearly, for the literary heightening of poetry, he is drawn to the spare beauty and noble diction of classical Hebrew (much as Milton, say, in constructing his poems of Paradise, invokes the cadences of classical Latin).

And beyond the question of language, the scholars lead us to still another enchanted garden of context and allusion: the flowering, all over the Levant, of a form known as "wisdom literature." A kind of folk-philosophy linking virtue to prudence, and pragmatically geared to the individual's worldly success, it intends instruction in level-headed judgment and in the achievement of rational contentment. The biblical Proverbs belong to this genre, and, in a more profoundly reflective mode, so do Ecclesiastes and portions of Job; but wisdom literature can also be found in Egyptian, Babylonian, Ugaritic, and Hellenistic sources. It has no overriding national roots and deals with personal rather than collective conduct, and with a commonsensical morality guided by principles of resourcefulness and discretion. A great part of the Book of Job finds its ancestry in the region's pervasive wisdom literature (and its descendants in today's self-improvement best-sellers). But what genuinely seizes the heart are those revolutionary passages in Job that violently contradict what all the world, yesterday and today, takes for ordinary wisdom.

However seductive they are in their insight and learning, all these scholarly excavations need not determine or deter our own reading. We, after all, have in our hands neither the Hebrew original nor a linguistic concordance. What we do have—and it is electrifying enough—is the Book of Job as we readers of English encounter it. And if we are excluded from the sound and texture of an elevated poetry in a tongue not ours, we are also shielded from problems of structure and chronology, and from a confrontation with certain endemic philological riddles. There is riddle enough remaining—a riddle that is, besides, an elemental quest, the appeal for an answer to humankind's primal inquiry.

So there is something to be said for novice readers who come to Job's demands and plaints unaccoutered: we will perceive God's world exactly as Job himself perceives it. Or put it that Job's bewilderment will be ours,

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and our kinship to his travail fully unveiled, only if we are willing to absent ourselves from the accretion of centuries of metaphysics, exegesis, theological polemics. Of the classical Jewish and Christian theologians (Saadia Gaon, Rashi, ibn Ezra, Maimonides, Gersonides, Gregory, Aquinas, Calvin), each wrote from a viewpoint dictated by his particular religious perspective. But for us to be as (philosophically) naked as Job will mean to be naked of bias, dogma, tradition. It will mean to imagine Job solely as he is set forth by his own words in his own story.

His story, because it is mostly in dialogue, reads as a kind of drama. There is no proscenium; there is no scenery. But there is the dazzling spiral of words—extraordinary words, Shakespearean words; and there are the six players, who alternately cajole, console, contradict, contend, satirize, fulminate, remonstrate, accuse, deny, trumpet, succumb. Sometimes we are reminded of *Antigone,* sometimes of *Oedipus* (Greek plays that are contemporaneous with Job), sometimes of *Othello.* The subject is innocence and power; virtue and injustice; the Creator and His Creation; or what philosophy has long designated as theodicy, the Problem of Evil. And the more we throw off sectarian sophistries—the more we attend humbly to the drama as it plays itself out—the more clearly we will see Job as he emerges from the venerable thicket of theodicy into the heat of our own urgency. Or call it our daily breath.

Job's story—his fate, his sentence—begins in heaven, with Satan as prosecuting attorney. Job, Satan presses, must be put to trial. Look at him: a man of high estate, an aristocrat, robust and in his prime, the father of sons and daughters, respected, affluent, conscientious, charitable, virtuous, God-fearing. God-fearing? How effortless to be always praising God when you are living in such ease! Look at him: how he worries about his lucky children and their feasting, days at a time—was there too much wine, did they slide into blasphemy? On their account he brings sacred offerings in propitiation. His possessions are lordly, but he succors the poor and turns no one away; his hand is lavish. Yet look at him—how easy to be righteous when you are carefree and rich! Strip him of his wealth, wipe out his family, afflict him with disease, and *then* see what becomes of his virtue and his piety!

So God is persuaded to test Job. Invasion, fire, tornado, destruction, and the cruelest loss of all: the death of his children. Nothing is left. Odious lesions creep over every patch of Job's skin. Tormented, he sits in the embers of what was once his domain and scratches himself with a bit of shattered bowl. His wife despairs: after all this, he still declines to curse God! She means for him to dismiss God as worthless to his life, and to dismiss his ruined life as worthless. But now a trio of gentlemen from neighboring lands arrives—a condolence call from Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, Job's distinguished old friends. The three weep and are mute.

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Job's broken figure appalls: pitiable, desolate, dusted with ash, scraped, torn.

All the foregoing is told in the plain prose of a folktale: a blameless man's undoing through the conniving of a mischievous sprite. A prose epilogue will ultimately restore Job to his good fortune, and, in the arbitrary style of a fable, will even double it; but between the two halves of this simple narrative of loss and restitution the coloration of legend falls away, and a majesty of outcry floods speech after speech. And then Job's rage ascends—a rage against the loathsomeness of "wisdom."

When the horrified visitors regain their voices, it is they who appear to embody reasonableness, logic, and prudence, while Job—introduced in the prologue as a man of steadfast faith who will never affront the Almighty—rails like a blasphemer against an unjust God. The three listen courteously as Job bewails the day he was born, a day that "did not shut the doors of my mother's womb, nor hide trouble from my eyes." In response to which Eliphaz begins his first attempt at solace: "Can mortal man be righteous before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker? . . . Behold, happy is the man whom God reproves; therefore despise not the chastening of the Almighty." Here is an early and not altogether brutal hint of what awaits Job in the severer discourse of his consolers: the logic of punishment, the dogma of requital. If a man suffers, it must be because of some impiety he has committed. Can Job claim that he is utterly without sin? And is not God a merciful God, "for He wounds, but binds up; He smites, but His hands heal"? In the end (Eliphaz reassures Job), all will be well.

Job is not comforted; he is made furious. He has been accused, however obliquely, of having sinned, and he knows with his whole soul that he has not. His friends show themselves to be as inconstant as a torrential river, icy in winter, vanishing away in the heat. Rather than condole, they defame. They root amelioration in besmirchment. But if Job's friends are no friends, then what of God? The poet, remembering the psalm—"What is man that thou are mindful of him?"—has Job echo the very words. "What is man," Job charges God, that "thou dost set thy mind upon him, dost visit him every morning, and test him every moment? . . . If I sin, what do I do to thee, thou watcher of men?" And he dreams of escaping God in death: "For now I shall lie in the earth; thou wilt seek me, but I shall not be."

Three rounds of increasingly tumultuous debate follow, with Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar each having a turn, and Job replying. Wilder and wilder grow the visitors' accusations; wilder and wilder grow Job's rebuttals, until they are pitched into an abyss of bitterness. Job's would-be comforters have become his harriers; men of standing themselves, they reason from the conventional doctrines of orthodox religion, wherein conduct and consequence are morally linked: goodness rewarded, wick-

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edness punished. No matter how hotly Job denies and protests, what greater proof of Job's impiety can there be than his deadly ordeal? God is just; he metes out just deserts. Is this not the grand principle on which the world rests?

Job's own experience refutes these arguments; and his feverish condemnation of God's injustice refutes religion itself. "I am blameless!" he cries yet again, and grimly concludes: "It is all one: therefore I say, He destroys both the blameless and the wicked. When disaster brings sudden death, He mocks the calamity of the innocent. The earth is given into the hand of the wicked; He covers the face of its judges." Here Job, remarkably, is both believer and atheist. God's presence is incontrovertible; God's moral integrity is nil. And how strange: in the heart of Scripture, a righteous man impugning God! Genesis, to be sure, records what appears to be a precedent. "Wilt thou destroy the righteous with the wicked?" Abraham asks God when Sodom's fate is at stake; but that is more plea than indictment, and anyhow there is no innocence in Sodom. Yet how distant Job is from the Psalmist who sings "The Lord is upright . . . there is no unrighteousness in Him," who pledges that "the righteous shall flourish like the palm tree" and "the workers of iniquity shall be destroyed forever." The Psalmist's is the voice of faith. Job's is the voice of a wounded lover, betrayed.

Like a wounded lover, he envisions, fleetingly, a forgiving afterlife, the way a tree, cut down to a stump, can send forth new shoots and live again—while man, by contrast, "lies down and rises not again." Or he imagines the workings of true justice: on the one hand, he wishes he might bring God Himself to trial; on the other, he ponders man-made law and its courts and declares that the transcript of his testimony ought to be inscribed permanently in stone, so that some future clansman might one day come as a vindicator, to proclaim the probity of Job's case. (Our translation famously renders the latter as "I know that my Redeemer lives," a phrase that has, of course, been fully integrated into Christian hermeneutics.) Throughout, there is a thundering of discord and clangor. "Miserable comforters are you all!" Job groans. "Surely there are mockers about me"—while Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar press on, from pious apologias to uncontrolled denunciation. You, Job, they accuse, you who stripped the naked of their clothing, gave no water to the weary, withheld bread from the hungry!

And Job sees how the tenets of rectitude, in the mouths of the zealous, are perverted to lies.

But now, abruptly, a new voice is heard: a fifth and so far undisclosed player strides onstage. He is young, intellectually ingenious, confident, a bit brash. Unlike the others, he bears a name with a Hebrew ring to it: Elihu. "I also will declare my opinion," he announces. He arrives as a supplanter, to replace stale wisdom with fresh, and begins by rebuking

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Job's haranguers for their dogma of mechanical tit for tat. As for Job: in his recalcitrance, in his litanies of injured innocence, in his prideful denials, he has been blind to the *uses* of suffering; and doesn't he recognize that God manifests Himself in night visions and dreams? Suffering educates and purifies; it humbles pride, tames the rebel, corrects the scoffer. "What man is like Job, who drinks up scoffing like water?" Elihu points out—but here the reader detects a logical snag. Job has become a scoffer only as a result of gratuitous suffering: then how is such suffering a "correction" of scoffing that never was? Determined though he is to shake Job's obstinacy, Elihu is no wiser than his elders. Job's refusal of meaningless chastisement stands.

So Elihu, too, fails as comforter. Yet as he leaves off suasion, his speech metamorphoses into a hymn in praise of God's dominion. "Hear this, O Job," Elihu calls, "stop and consider the wondrous work of God"—wind, cloud, sky, snow, lightning, ice! Elihu's sumptuous limning of God's power in nature is a fore-echo of the sublime climax to come.

Job, gargantuan figure in the human imagination that he is, is not counted among the prophets. He is not the first to be reluctant to accept God's authority: Jonah rebelled against sailing to Nineveh in order to prophesy; yet he did go, and his going was salvational for a people not his own. But the true prophets are self-starters, spontaneous fulminators against social inequity, and far from reluctant. Job, then, has much in common with Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah, and Amos: he is wrathful that the wicked go unpunished, that the widow and the orphan go unsuccored, that the world is not clothed in righteousness. Like the noblest of the prophets, he assails injustice; and still he is unlike them. They accuse the men and women who do evil; their targets are made of flesh and blood. It is human transgression they hope to mend. Job seeks to rectify God. His is an ambition higher, deeper, vaster, grander than theirs; he is possessed by a righteousness more frenzied than theirs; the scale of his justice-hunger exceeds all that precedes him, all that was ever conceived; he can be said to be the consummate prophet. And at the same time he is the consummate violator. If we are to understand him at all, if we are rightly to enter into his passions at their pinnacle, then we ought to name him prophet; but we may not. Call him, instead, anti-prophet. His teaching, after all, verges on atheism: the rejection of God's power. His thesis is revolution.

Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar are silenced. Elihu will not strut these boards again. Job's revolution may be vanity of vanities, but his adversaries have lost confidence and are scattered. Except for Job, the stage is emptied.

Then God enters—not in a dream, as Elihu theorized, not as a vision or incarnation, but as an irresistible Eloquence.

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Here I am obliged to remark on the obvious. In recapitulating certain passages, I have reduced an exalted poem to ordinary spoken sentences. But the ideas that buttress Job are not merely "expressed in," as we say, language of high beauty; they are inseparable from an artistry so far beyond the grasp of mind and tongue that one can hardly imagine their origin. We think of the Greek plays; we think of Shakespeare; and still that is not marvel enough. Is it that the poet is permitted to sojourn, for the poem's brief life, in the magisterial Eye of God? Or is it God who allows Himself to peer through the poet's glass, as through a gorgeously crafted kaleidoscope? The words of the poem are preternatural, unearthly. They may belong to a rhapsodic endowment so rare as to appear among mortals only once in three thousand years. Or they may belong to the Voice that hurls itself from the whirlwind.

God has granted Job's demand: "Let the Almighty answer me!" Now here at last is Job's longed-for encounter with that Being he conceives to be his persecutor. What is most extraordinary in this visitation is that it appears to be set apart from everything that has gone before. What is the Book of Job *about?* It is about gratuitous affliction. It is about the wicked who escape whipping. It is about the suffering of the righteous. God addresses none of this. It is as if He has belatedly stepped into the drama without having consulted the script—none of it: not even so much as the prologue. He does not remember Satan's mischief. He does not remember Job's calamities. He does not remember Job's righteousness.

As to the last: Job will hardly appeal for an accounting from God without first offering one of his own. He has his own credibility to defend, his own probity. "Let me be weighed in a just balance," he insists, "and let God know my integrity!" The case for his integrity takes the form of a bill of particulars that is unsurpassed as a compendium of compassionate human conduct: no conceivable ethical nuance is omitted. It is as if all the world's moral fervor, distilled from all the world's religions, and touching on all the world's pain, is assembled in Job's roster of loving-kindness. Job in his confession of integrity is both a protector and a lover of God's world.

But God seems alarmingly impatient; His mind is elsewhere. Is this the Lord whom Job once defined as a "watcher of men"? God's answer, a fiery challenge, roils out of the whirlwind. "Where were *you,*" the Almighty roars, in supernal strophes that blaze through the millennia, "when I laid the foundation of the earth?" And what comes crashing and tumbling out of the gale is an exuberant ode to the grandeur of the elements, to the fecundity of nature: the sea and the stars, the rain and the dew, the constellations in their courses, the lightning, the lion, the raven, the ass, the goat, the ostrich, the horse, the hawk—and more, more, more! The lavishness, the extravagance, the infinitude! An infini-

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tude of power; an infinitude of joy; an infinitude of love, even for the ugly hippopotamus, even for the crocodile with his terrifying teeth, even for creatures made mythical through ancient lore. Even for Leviathan! Nothing in the universe is left unpraised in these glorious stanzas—and one thinks: had the poet access to the electrons, had he an inkling of supernovas, had he parsed the chains of DNA, God's ode to Creation could not be richer. Turn it and turn it—God's ode: everything is in it.

Everything but the answer to the question that eats at Job's soul: why God permits injustice in the fabric of a world so resplendently woven. Job is conventionally judged to be a moral violator because he judges God Himself to be a moral violator. Yet is there any idea in the history of human thought more exquisitely tangled, more furiously daring, more heroically courageous, more rooted in spirit and conscience than Job's question? Why does God not praise the marrow of such a man as Job at least as much as He praises the intricacy of the crocodile's scales? God made the crocodile; He also made Job.

God's answer to Job lies precisely in His not answering; and Job, with lightning insight, comprehends. "I have uttered what I did not understand," he acknowledges, "things too wonderful for me, which I did not know."

His new knowledge is this: that a transcendent God denies us a god of our own devising, a god that we would create out of our own malaise, or complaint, or desire, or hope, or imagining; or would manufacture according to the satisfaction of our own design. We are part of God's design: can the web manufacture the spider? The Voice out of the whirlwind warns against god-manufacture—against the degradation of a golden calf surely, but also against god-manufacture even in the form of the loftiest visions. Whose visions are they? Beware: they are not God's; they are ours. The ways of the true God cannot be penetrated. The false comforters cannot decipher them. Job cannot uncover them. "The secret things belong to the Lord our God," Job's poet learned long ago, reading Deuteronomy. But now: see how Job cannot draw Leviathan out with a hook—how much less can he draw out God's nature, and His purpose!

So the poet, through the whirlwind's answer, stills Job.

But can the poet still the Job who lives in us? God's majesty is eternal, manifest in cell and star. Yet Job's questions toil on, manifest in death camp and hatred, in tyranny and anthrax, in bomb and bloodshed. Why do the wicked thrive? Why do the innocent suffer? In brutal times, the whirlwind's answer tempts, if not atheism, then the sorrowing conviction of God's indifference.

And if we are to take the close of the tale as given, it is not only Job's protests that are stilled; it is also his inmost moral urge. What has become of raging conscience? What has become of loving-kindness? Prosperity is restored; the dead children are replaced by twice the number of boys,

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and by girls exceedingly comely. But where now is the father's bitter grief over the loss of those earlier sons and daughters, on whose account he once indicted God? Cushioned again by good fortune, does Job remember nothing, feel nothing, see nothing beyond his own renewed honor? Is Job's lesson from the whirlwind finally no more than the learning of indifference?

So much for the naked text. Perhaps this is why—century after century—we common readers go on clinging to the spiritualizing mentors of traditional faith, who clothe in comforting theologies this God-wrestling and comfortless Book.

Yet how astoundingly up to date they are, those ancient sages—redactors and compilers—who opened even the sacred gates of Scripture to philosophic doubt!

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My German Question

PETER GAY

There are three ways of becoming a Jew: by birth, by conversion, or by decree. Brushed by only a breath of the first, I was forcibly enlisted in the third group after January 30, 1933, the day that Hitler came to power and gave my life an ineradicable undertone of mourning.

In 1933 I was ten and living in Berlin. My parents were so sure of their disbelief in God and their disdain for rituals that agnosticism struck them as a tepid compromise. The idea of attachment to a social community or a common heritage was virtually meaningless to them. Jewish awareness? Jewish identity? These were empty slogans to them—and hence to me. All that was for theologians. The thought that Judaism could be anything more than a religion entered their minds only glancingly. We did not celebrate Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur, and I had no bar mitzvah. To underscore their distance from all religiosity, my parents had officially left the Jewish community and declared themselves, and me, *konfessionslos*—"without denomination." In Weimar Germany, this declaration meant that none of their taxes went to support churches or synagogues.

My upbringing was thus not simply irreligious; it was anti-religious. My mother, from a solid, middle-class family in Breslau, was, quietly, an atheist. My father, a self-educated businessman whose firm represented manufacturers of crystal and porcelain, was more aggressive, a bluff and out-

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spoken man with firm views on where he stood in the historic battle between reason and unreason. When sacred matters came up, his abiding theme was the triumph of form over substance and greed over reverence. He said that, despite all protestations, religion—every religion—failed to make people less cruel or more moral. Quite the contrary, it provided alibis for egotism, bigotry, hypocrisy, and the release of aggressive impulses. The Jews of Kempen, a town near the small village in Upper Silesia where he was born, served his didactic purposes well. Aware that their creed forbade them to handle money on the Sabbath but unwilling to forgo the income that a store open on Saturdays brought, they would shove their takings into the cash register with their elbows. (It did not occur to me then that this must be a tale as improbable as it was tendentious.) Piety could hardly grow on so barren a soil. I did not regret my godless condition, however; I thought, a little melodramatically, that it made me a free man.

My parents did not scruple to put up a Christmas tree and hide Easter eggs. To their mind, both of these holidays were simply secular; their Christian trappings struck them as superficial decor. For all this, they had no intention of concealing their origins, as many Jews had done, by converting to Christianity. Baptism might bring social and professional dividends, but for my parents such an act would have meant exchanging one superstition for another. It would turn out, of course, that the Nazis' racial definition of Jewishness would have made any such subterfuge irrelevant.

Nature and my parents seem to have prepared me well for the hazards of daily life under the Nazis. I had blue eyes and a straight nose, brown hair and regular features—in short, like my parents, I did not "look Jewish." And my upbringing as an only child seemed almost intentionally aimed to help me escape particular notice, whether on the street, in a department store, or in the stands of a soccer stadium. I was composed, polite; I did not invite attention.

On a deeper level, too, I was ready, though of course I was quite ignorant of this at the time. Having learned to banish from awareness, or at least to control, my rage, I was not about to make uncalled-for remarks, or even faces, at fluttering black-red-and-white flags adorned with the swastika or the sordid spectacle of brownshirts marching down Berlin's streets as if they owned them—as, of course, after January 30, 1933, they did. I was exposed to such exhibitions nearly every day: the Nazis were adroit at political theater. They even uprooted the venerable linden trees lining the city's most distinguished avenue, Unter den Linden, to make more room for displays of flags and uniformed marchers. I had been well trained to show no reaction, make no comment. Not that I was trying to pass; I was made to pass.

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The advent of the Third Reich is a blank in my mind—a conspicuous instance of repression at work. After all, my parents must have talked about the Nazis' bid for power every day, and anxiously; certainly the press was full of it. On April 1, 1933, Germany's new masters staged a countrywide boycott of Jewish stores, lawyers, and physicians. Brownshirts and some black-shirted SS men, posted at strategic spots, "warned" potential customers against patronizing Jewish businesses. Enormous posters plastered on walls and kiosks proclaimed, "The Jews of the whole world want to destroy Germany! German Volk! Defend yourself! Do not buy from Jews!" This "action" was not much of a success. But what bodily threats and inflammatory slogans did not accomplish, servile institutions managed with ease. Professional organizations hastened to expel "non-Aryan" writers and newspapermen, while orchestras and theaters dismissed conductors, directors, and performers they judged to be racially ineligible or politically tainted. The Jewish professors' turn came soon after, while Jewish executives in banks, commerce, or industry were prematurely pensioned. On April 7, a comprehensive Civil Service Act excluded Jews from all public employment. The exodus was well under way. The fortunate Jews (though that's not the way we saw it at the time) had the decision to flee forced upon them. For less well prepared men like my father, who had no foreign languages or portable specialty, the situation was less clear-cut and the prospects obscure. They were complicated further by the mixed signals that were all we had to go on.

My admission to, and years in, the Goethe Gymnasium in Wilmersdorf, in western Berlin, were one long demonstration of these signals at work. During the Weimar Republic, my matriculation at a Gymnasium would have been a matter of course; my parents' class and my grades would have guaranteed it. But in 1933 a newly proclaimed policy restricted the number of Jewish boys to be accepted. Their percentage was not to exceed the percentage of Jews in Berlin's population—just under 4 percent. However, a special circumstance exempted me from any quota. My father had been wounded in the First World War, a condition that granted him the Iron Cross Second Class and entitled him to such privileges as riding first-class on a second-class railroad ticket. It also gave his son an unquestioned place in the Gymnasium of his choice. (I should add that after Pearl Harbor, when our family was safely living in the United States, my father was featured in the local papers for contributing his Iron Cross to the local scrap drive that was collecting metal for the American war effort.)

I attended the Goethe Gymnasium for five years. The pressure on Jewish pupils there was selective: I was never ridiculed, never harassed, never attacked. But my cousin Edgar was victimized more than once, threatened with being dragged before a *Stürmer* display and made to read it. The *Stürmer*—need I remind anyone?—was the pornographic anti-

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Semitic weekly, edited by Julius Streicher, which featured stories and cartoons depicting savagely caricatured Jews with repellent curly hair, grotesquely hooked noses, evil eyes, and fat, sensual lips, busy cheating the world, orchestrating hostility to the Third Reich, and, worse, lusting after blond, often half-naked "Aryan" women. I find it soothing to recall that Streicher was convicted at the Nürnberg trials and hanged. He is a principal reason why my opposition to the death penalty has always been halfhearted.

In other schools, Jewish students were verbally, and in some cases physically, abused on a daily basis. But the Goethe Gymnasium had an atmosphere that was remarkably bland, almost unpolitical. We Jews were never forced to sing the "Horst-Wessel Lied" or other Nazi hymns. Many years later, an American interviewer, furious with my parents for failing to transfer me to a Jewish school, wondered how I must have felt when I had to sing that awful verse about Jewish blood spurting from a knife—*wenn jüdisch' Blut vom Messer spritzt.* I could only tell her that during my years at school, I had never even heard that song, let alone been compelled to join in.

Among the anti-Semitic minority, our French teacher, as far as I can recall, lost control only once. He had asked a Jewish student to translate a passage in which the word *pluie* occurred, and my classmate rendered it as *Wolkenbruch*—cloudburst. This is admittedly rather strong for *rain,* but I was baffled when our teacher responded with a cloudburst of his own: "The Jews always exaggerate!" This was news to me, and I found the shouted accusation troubling. Was hyperbole one of those Jewish defects that the Nazi authorities kept denouncing? Or was this just another instance of the lies my father had warned me about? It is ludicrous to load down a casual explosion with heavy significance, but I have sometimes wondered whether my unremitting search for precision in my writing has in part been fueled by this "cloudburst."

Although my Gymnasium was surprisingly decent, I recall an anti-Semitic incident that had its counterpart across the country and has become a familiar part of refugee lore. It reads almost like an archetypal fiction illustrating the comprehensiveness of Nazi mendacity, but it is true enough. Twice a week, we had music class, which consisted mainly of singing songs. I can still visualize a page of our songbook open to the *Lorelei,* a famous art song after a poem by Heinrich Heine. Our textbook, obviously revised after January 1933, listed its author as "unknown." A hundred years before Hitler, Heine had observed that a country that burns books will one day burn people. He could not have known that his seemingly extravagant prediction would come true one day. In the Third Reich, Heine had become a nonperson. How many of us in the mid-'30s, Nazis included, had any inkling that Germany's Jews would become nonpersons in more fatal ways?

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It remains worth underscoring that, caught in the maelstrom of political upheavals, we Jews had to live our ordinary lives, struggling for grades in school, going to the dentist, buying groceries for dinner, visiting friends, in addition to worrying about the Nazis' plans for us and about the precise contours of our Jewishness. During my six years in Nazi Germany, I developed strategies for survival designed to keep me as sane as possible in the madhouse into which the accident of birth and the perversity of history had thrown me. I read German and English books, went to museums, collected stamps, and attended soccer matches. I even went to the 1936 Olympics, for which my father, well informed about sports, had managed to buy two tickets in 1932 on one of his business trips to Budapest, well before Berlin's Olympic stadium had even been built. Getting ahead of the mob of ticket buyers was canny enough; placing us among a cadre of colorful, noisy Hungarian fans was cannier still. It meant that we could simply blend in with our surroundings, so that we did not have to give the Nazi salute when the Führer appeared. Jesse Owens's four gold medals were stirring, but for us the high point was the women's 4x100 meter relay race, in which the German foursome was expected to triumph. In the last leg of the race, something went wrong. As long as I live I shall hear my father's voice as he leaped to his feet, one of the first to see what had happened. *"Die Mädchen haben den Stab verloren!"* he shouted joyfully. "The girls have dropped the baton!" As the American anchor loped to the tape, the unbeatable models of Nazi womanhood put their arms around each other and cried their German hearts out. Witnessing this calamity was one of the happiest moments of my life: an incomparably sweet instance of *Schadenfreude.* (Is there any significance to the fact that this word for the pleasure in the discomfiture of others exists only in German?)

To come home and close the front door of our apartment on the Schweidnitzerstrasse was, at least to some measure, to shut out the world—a world where the Axis treaties were being signed and the Nürnberg Laws, depriving Jews of German citizenship, were being enacted. My father lowered the tension in which I lived by reassuring me that I was as good a person as I hoped I was and feared I was not. The little disrespectful anti-government jokes he liked to tell, in a low voice and a safe place, were soothing as well. What does the ideal "Aryan" look like? As tall as Goebbels, as slim as Göring, as blond as Hitler. Or: What happens when Hitler, at the wheel of his purring power machine, runs over a dog near a farmhouse? A little abashed, Hitler instructs a couple of his SS men to apologize to the owner while he waits in the car. Some time passes, and at last the envoys return, laden with gifts: a crate of apples, a basket of plums, a brace of sausages. The Führer, astonished, asks what happened. "We went into the house," one SS man reports, "and said, Heil Hitler! The dog is dead!" We knew that these jokes were like

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pitching paper airplanes at a tank, and it is hard to believe, or to convey, how much relief such levity brought us, if only for a moment. Whatever rationality we could rescue lay in these little improvised festivities, in which we could briefly shake off our tormentors and show our spirit.

My father figured in still another sanity-preserving strategy. I have always had a craving for chocolate. (It is one of the malicious tricks of fate that I, of all people, should have developed, in recent years, a mild case of diabetes that puts sweets out of bounds.) My father frequently brought me, from downtown Berlin, little white bags that contained two sorts of chocolate. One bag held little stamped pieces made on a form—chimney sweeps, soldiers, four-leaf clovers. They were delectable. The second sort, called *Borke,* or bark, was even more so. The pieces were round, with deep rills circling the surface, looking, as the name suggests, like small segments of trees. They melted very easily, and a bit of the chocolate, like a very small, very thin, and very tender leaf, would stick to my fingers. My father deposited these little white bags in the right-hand glass turret of our looming mahogany buffet, more or less above the copy of *Die Ideale Ehe (Ideal Marriage),* a fascinating sex manual by Theodoor van de Velde, which he had hidden in the lower cabinet (but which, of course, I read and reread). Our overpowering piece of furniture thus provided, as a psychoanalyst in a sprightly mood might see it, oral pleasures at the top and genital pleasures at the bottom.

I am sure that every German Jewish adolescent survived the early years of the Third Reich through similar facsimiles of normalcy. Without such mental escape routes, our disorientation, our sense of being under unremitting assault, would have been beyond bearing. Sly and gross in turn, the anti-Semitic propaganda campaigns, calculated to drive us to despair, were so incessant, so repetitious, so all-embracing, that it was all but impossible to escape them. Our confidence that whatever we heard from official sources was a lie could give us some relief, but it was temporary at best.

At our worst, many of us must have found the lure of what Anna Freud has called identification with the aggressor quite seductive. It is the maneuver we know from sensational cases past and present: the American colonist who, abducted by Indians, chooses to stay with them rather than return home; the victim of a kidnapping who falls in love with her captor. To be in the victors' shoes just once, to relax our vigilance and our constant need to keep our critical faculties alert to dismiss ever new libels, to march with the triumphant enemy, to have someone to admire beyond reason!

I find it repulsive to confess the very existence of such an obscene aberration, even to think about it, however fleeting and occasional it must have been. A moment's thought would have exposed such notions

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as not merely unworthy but wholly impractical. The handful of right-wing Jews who in 1933 thought it possible to reach an accommodation with the Nazis soon learned that they had foolishly misjudged Hitler's intentions. And so, if the alluring appeal of surrender may have crossed some of our minds, it would have flared up only to be rejected. But after three or four years of trying to stand erect in the whirlwind of hate and contempt, the most resilient among us were exhausted by the effort of keeping our defenses in working order.

So why did it take us so long to pack our bags? I would later encounter many critics of German Jewish assimilation who asked me that question. For them, our situation had been obvious from the start. German Jews, they said, without fear and without research (to borrow a phrase from the historian Charles Beard), had been culpably blind in the face of spectacular warnings and had sold out to an irresponsible fantasy known as the German-Jewish symbiosis.

Self-appointed commentators, especially decades after the fact, found it all too easy to reprimand German Jewry collectively: "And you still thought, after the Nürnberg Laws and other horrors, that you were Germans?" But we *were* Germans; the gangsters who had taken control of the country were not Germany—*we* were. Like everyone else interested in this dismal controversy, I learned about the much-quoted indictment of German Jewry by Gershom Scholem; a Zionist from his youth, he had argued since the early 1920s that the notion of a German-Jewish symbiosis was sheer self-delusion. The Jews, he insisted memorably, had loved the Germans, but the Germans had never loved the Jews.

Yet my parents and I did not think we were living a delusion. Granted, our Germany had taken refuge in exile or was living underground at home, and resistance to Nazi oppression appeared to be impossible. But we believed that the Nazis had no right to impose their perversion of history and biology on us. By 1936, we knew that sooner or later Germany would be no place for us. But when? We did not know, and our tormentors did not know either. How were we to know, when the Nazis themselves did not, that they would drastically speed up the timetable of their persecutions?

The most formidable obstacle to fathoming things to come was doubtless the very insanity of the Hitlerian program. "It was all in *Mein Kampf!*" has long been the litany of our detractors, who, without an inkling of what it meant to uproot oneself and how hard it was to read the signals, reproached me or my parents for not having started packing on January 30, 1933. But Hitler's threats were so utterly implausible, so literally incredible, that we regarded them as unreliable guides to future conduct. Germany, after all, was the most civilized of countries; it was the country that, next to the United States, was the haven of choice for

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Eastern European Jewish emigrants who were looking for a tolerant society relatively free of anti-Semitism. France had shown its anti-Jewish leanings in the Dreyfus case; England seemed an almost impermeable society; the German record was one of a century-long, almost uninterrupted improvement of relations between its Jewish and gentile populations.

We now know that, tragically, Polish Jews influential in their communities shared this illusion, and it would prove fatal to them. In the fall of 1939, as German troops were sweeping through the Polish countryside, Jews who were clustered in villages and small towns debated just what to do: flee eastward toward the Russians or stay and put their faith in the Germans. The Russians were a known, and hated, quantity; the Germans had retained the good reputation they had established in the First World War, when German occupiers of Polish soil had shown themselves civilized and generous to the Jews. Sadly out of touch with the world, Jews in Poland, faced with the necessity for immediate action, allowed their memories of the good Germans of the past to overpower their incomplete and inaccurate information about the evil Germans of the present. The result was Nazi mass murder.

Paradoxically, in some ways the decent Germans who kept in touch with us and, when we needed them, helped us, did us no favor: they made the Nazis' promise of a new Aryan era appear all the crazier. Until 1941, the Nazis themselves had no clear agenda of just how to proceed against the Jews. They had eliminated "Jewish influence" on high German culture, on the press, on finance, in government, in much of business; for the rest, they were going to get rid of Jews by exporting them. The "final solution," to use one of their damnable euphemisms, was only a glimmer in the eyes of the most fanatical anti-Semites.

I stop for a minute to consider what I have written. We were not so stupid, not so deluded, certainly not so treacherous as we have been judged to be, usually by other Jews. It is no doubt legitimate to read much of this essay as an apology for my parents and for my fellow German Jews. But it is an unapologetic apology. After spending years pondering this matter, I remain convinced that our critics have never quite understood the dilemmas we faced in the 1930s; most of them never even took the trouble to try to understand them.

By 1937, however, my family had grown weary enough of the drumbeat of racist propaganda and economic chicanery to recognize that it was finally time to act. Our opportunity came with a transatlantic visit, occasioned by my grandmother's failing health, from my Onkel Alfred and Aunt Grace, who lived in the United States. The plan we formulated during this crucial visit seemed reasonableness itself: my cousin Hanns would move to America first, followed by his brother Edgar and me. Our parents and another uncle would join us soon after. The priority given to Hanns, the eldest boy, was natural: he would complete his Gymnasium

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education the following year, and Edgar and I could come over shortly afterward, as soon as was practical. No one considered keeping us two younger boys in the Thousand-Year Reich until we had completed our stint at the Goethe Gymnasium in 1941: that much at least we had learned. There was a sense of urgency in our talks, but no panic. A year more or less, we believed, would make no difference.

In response to this agenda, Edgar and I began to study English around the end of 1937. I took to it as though it were my mother tongue that I had mysteriously forgotten, as through a sudden amnesia—the kind that used to affect people on daytime radio serials—and was reclaiming with remarkable speed. I fell in love with the language and came to regard it as an incomparable vehicle for expressiveness. I still do, and take the many pages I have written in English as so many tributes to what I like to call my adopted first language.

My English teacher was a woman of a certain age, slender, with an attractive, somewhat husky voice that may have been the result of heavy smoking. Her apartment was full of books. I liked her immensely, and I sometimes wonder what happened to her in the Holocaust years. Was she herded onto a cattle car and sent to the gas chambers? I cannot remember her name, but I harbor the faint hope that she may read this—although she would be quite elderly by now—and write to let me know that she, too, made it out. It is terrible to think of her as a name on a casualty list. She remains a part of my past that seems dead but is not resolved, a piece of achingly unfinished business.

The self-confidence my teacher awakened in me allowed me to venture, boldly and precociously, into English literature. The first book I bought to assuage my imperious appetite—I found it on one of those carts that had supplied me with detective novels for some time—is still a treasured possession. It was a cheap, badly mauled paperback copy of Shaw's *Saint Joan.* The previous owner, whose grasp of English was even shakier than mine, had marked a number of less familiar words with German equivalents. This little venture has made me value Shaw's play, impressive as it is, beyond its merits. I suppose I have always needed spotless heroes, whether in sports or in drama. Another book I read in those days, *Gone with the Wind,* I did not dare tackle in English. For me, the novel will always be *Vom Winde Verweht,* and I can still produce its opening phrase: *"Scarlett O'Hara war nicht eigentlich schön zu nennen, aber . . . ,"* which, in the original, reads, a little more economically: "Scarlett O'Hara was not beautiful, but . . . "

By 1938, such moments of normal pleasure were thin fare. The Nazis had invaded Austria in mid-March to the frenzied cheers of Austrian multitudes and virtually no protests from foreign governments. We followed events with mounting repugnance and alarm. Radio Strasbourg, our sole resource for truthful newscasts, reported on the well-organized,

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unchecked, government-sponsored thievery that was robbing Austria's Jews of property and livelihood and on the thousands of imaginative Austrians who were committing acts of spontaneous sadism. So much for the city on the beautiful blue Danube! Casually formed crowds forced any Jew they could lay their hands on to recite passages from *Mein Kampf* or to clean up anti-Semitic graffiti on walls and sidewalks with a toothbrush. We would have been troubled even more if it had occurred to us that this legally sanctioned lawlessness was only a dress rehearsal for worse pogroms soon to come.

Month by month—at times it seemed week by week—the Nazis tightened the noose around our necks, precisely when other countries were making it only too clear that few of us were welcome within their borders. By the thousands, citizens of the civilized world—politicians, preachers, artists, editorial writers—voiced sincere indignation at the persecution of the Jews in Germany, but with few honorable exceptions they fell silent when it came to rescuing the victims. The highly touted and justly maligned international conference at Evian, held in early July, was depressing proof that goodwill by itself was impotent. There was much humane talk and no humane action. Countries as population-hungry as Canada or Australia were uninterested in the likes of us. And the United States showed itself unwilling to relax its strict quota system—after the *Anschluss,* when Austria's quota was absorbed into the German one, it amounted to little over twenty-seven thousand a year. A bitter joke made the rounds among us, helpless witnesses to worldwide professions of helplessness: Evian spelled backwards reads "naive." My faith in my American idol, FDR, did not waver; in politics, too, I needed my heroes. But to us the absence of concrete steps after the summer of 1938 was a direct menace. Escape was all that mattered, but who would have us?

More and more German Jews not yet hounded out of a job or a profession were dismissed. One particular instance touched me directly: a much older friend, Walther Schreiber, who lived in our apartment house, had worked for thirty years at the Berlin headquarters of the Dresdner Bank, but on April 1, 1938, he was "retired" for being a "non-Aryan." In the same month, the few remaining Jewish students in the Goethe Gymnasium were permanently dismissed; not even I, the decorated war veteran's son, was spared. What was I to do with myself? My parents took my involuntary leisure as an opportunity to find a place that would train me in something useful, no matter what, as long as it was a skill I could transport to new climes. I therefore signed up for a trade school that, in retrospect, must have been a kind of reformatory where casualties among Berlin's adolescents could be parked and perhaps turned into employable citizens. It was such a hellhole that I remember nothing of it except that I felt wholly out of place, wholly alone. I left

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after about a month and found employment as an apprentice to a deaf dental technician. I worked hard for him but learned little. My mind was elsewhere, and the one bit of knowledge I have retained is that if you coat your hands with ice-cold water, you can, if you do it quickly, reach for an object immersed in boiling water without scalding yourself.

Meanwhile, the government multiplied anti-Jewish regulations and issued new, ever more stringent anti-Jewish edicts. Even a partial list may give the flavor of the time: in April, Jews were forbidden to conceal their share or their partnership in gentile enterprises and with gentile associates. In the same month, all Jewish fortunes above five thousand marks had to be registered with the Commissioner for the Four-Year Plan, which is to say Göring, and officials began to draw up registers of Jewish property across the country. Confiscations seemed only a matter of time.

Then, on July 1, the new order, or disorder, intruded on our own lives more massively than ever before: my father's partner Pelz—a gentile who looked Jewish, just as my father was a Jew who looked gentile—threw my father out of their joint firm without compensation and, given the Nazis' legal and judicial system, without recourse. We started to live off our savings and redoubled our efforts to leave Germany. I, too, was enlisted in the effort, going to consulates to pick up forms to fill out, typing up applications as well as I could. The dining table became our office, serving a single purpose: emigration. During the summer, we submitted an application for residence in Great Britain.

Other portents proliferated and at unprecedented speed. In June, Munich's largest synagogue was torched. Late in July, Jewish physicians were forbidden to treat gentile patients and were deprived of their status as doctors. In August, the forced sales of synagogues in various German cities at ludicrously low prices went forward. In September, it was the Jewish lawyers' turn: like Jewish physicians, they were stripped of their gentile clients and their professional titles, and called "Jewish consultants" instead. Meanwhile, in mid-August, in a classic exhibition of Nazi humor, the government compelled Jews to add "Israel" or "Sara" to their names—the passport issued to me in April 1939, in the name of Peter Israel Fröhlich (which, minus the Israel, was to become "Peter Jack Gay" in America), attests that this was not a momentary whim. In early October, the passports of German Jews were differentiated from those of "real" Germans by a red "J" stamped on the front page, an ingenious Swiss suggestion that the Nazis adopted with alacrity.

It is at such moments in my story that the criticisms start all over again. Why didn't you leave then and there? Why did you wait for atrocities that were bound to come? Was your father paralyzed (and I am not inventing these snide inquiries) by fear that he might make less money abroad? Such questions seem reasonable enough if one disregards the world in which we lived and the efforts we made to escape. What makes

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these hostile questions all the more infuriating is that they barely conceal a knowing and derisive undertone: Whatever happened to you served you right. Why did you—or your parents and grandparents—betray your Judaism and try to assimilate to a culture that did not want you? I have already raised the key response with two questions of my own: Who would have us, or in time?

Then, at the end of September 1938, came Munich, where the British and the French yielded to Nazi blackmail. A crippling lack of military preparedness and haunting memories of the devastating casualties of the First World War gave Western statesmen, they thought, little room for maneuver. They looked at the vast Allied cemeteries, the monuments in town squares and college chapels crowded with the names of the dead, and they wanted no part of another war. And the appeasers could rationalize their capitulation with the thought that the Germans had a point in clamoring that the Sudetenland, the largely German-speaking northern slice of Czechoslovakia, should be incorporated into the Thousand-Year Reich. That Czech government leaders were not invited to the banquet at which the great powers conspired to give away some of their territory left a bad taste, and so did Munich altogether; the name of the city became a byword for ignominious surrender. Only a few discordant voices spoke up against Hitler's aggressions, most eloquently that of Winston Churchill, who tried to alert the West to the consequences of appeasement. But at the time they found few echoes. When Britain's prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, returned after the conference at Munich, he claimed notoriously that he was bringing peace in his time. Hitler did not share this conviction, or shared it only at the cost of having all his territorial demands met.

Munich was father to the Kristallnacht; without the first, the second might never have happened. Hitler's complete diplomatic victory gave him and the rest of the Nazi leadership a giddy sense of being at liberty to do anything they liked abroad and at home. My grandmother and my cousin Hanns were fortunate. She died in October, and Hanns left for the United States in the same month; thus both were spared the catastrophe that overtook Germany's Jewry the following month.

Kristallnacht followed upon the death on November 9 of Ernst vom Rath, legation secretary at the German embassy in Paris. He had been shot two days before by a young Polish Jew distraught at the fate of his parents, who, along with some sixteen thousand Polish Jews living in Germany, had been mercilessly deported a few days earlier. The *Manchester Guardian,* the most consistent voice for decency anywhere in the world, wrote with feeling and complete accuracy of a "brutal expulsion." There was to be worse brutality soon.

Exploiting the event with their accustomed adroitness, Nazi propa-

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gandists spread the word that vom Rath's death created such fierce indignation among the German people that they went on a rampage. This version, that Kristallnacht represented a spontaneous response of angry Germans to a Jewish crime, was, of course, a lie. Local authorities across the country had compiled lists of Jewish stores months before and had the names and addresses of Jewish men on record; in Berlin, some time before this "impulsive" outburst of collective "indignation," Jewish store owners had been compelled to paint their names on their front windows in large white letters. If there was ever a thoroughly organized pogrom, it was Kristallnacht.

I know that the word *Kristallnacht* has been disparaged for presumably trivializing an event in which more than glass was shattered. The best estimate is that almost a hundred Jews were murdered during the riots and more than twenty-six thousand Jewish men were hauled off to concentration camps. Throughout Germany, synagogues were severely damaged or totally burnt out, and sacred scrolls were desecrated. Thousands of businesses and homes were ravaged or destroyed. There was some looting; stores with portable items like clothing were particularly likely to be emptied out. But for the majority of the rioters, the thrill lay in destruction for its own sake.

This wallowing in sheer aggressiveness has made Kristallnacht something of a puzzle. As historians have observed, the regime could have continued to rob German Jews of money, art, real estate—whatever they owned—by "legal" means and without resorting to gratuitous public violence. In an interesting article, "The Kristallnacht as a Public Degradation Ritual," my friend Peter Loewenberg, historian and psychoanalyst, has offered a persuasive explanation. The pogrom had results that obviously suited the regime's policy: it isolated the Jewish population of Germany even more from their former fellow citizens, and it served to intimidate gentile Germans: attempts to show sympathy for the victims, let alone give them assistance, were dangerous.

But there was more to it than this; Kristallnacht was, as Loewenberg has shown, a degradation ritual, a handy way of realizing the Nazi leaders' most unchecked fantasies about a "race" that to their twisted minds had infiltrated, exploited, and betrayed Germans for centuries. The Nazis' scenario called not only for depriving Jews of their livelihood and driving them from the country virtually penniless, but for doing so with the maximum publicity and in ways that would make them feel like the pariahs they had become. An eyewitness report from the American consul in Leipzig, David H. Buffum, which Loewenberg quotes, attests to this sick rapture: "Having demolished dwellings and hurled most of the movable effects on the streets, the insatiably sadistic perpetrators threw many of the trembling inmates into a small stream that flows through the Zoological Park, commanding the horrified spectators to spit at them,

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defile them with mud and jeer at their plight." The Nazis thus turned bystanders into accomplices.

The story of Kristallnacht has often been told, at times in ghastly detail, but I must speak of it because I was there. And I shall continue to use the conventional term because to me, as to most of the witnesses, it conveys far more than its literal meaning. I read it—no, I feel it—as a catastrophe that deepened my rancor against Germany and Germans, already powerful enough, into an indiscriminate hatred that survived long stretches of time quite unabated.

On the morning of November 10, when a good deal of the damage had already been done, I bicycled to work at the dental technician's office, following my customary route along residential streets, and noticed nothing out of the ordinary. Later that morning, my father called to say that there was trouble and that I should come home. Without asking for details, I got on my bike and, following a different course, pedaled through a city that seemed to have been visited by an army of vandals. So, of course, it had, but what made this visitation extraordinary was that these vandals had been set in motion by the regime itself. The route I took on the way home happened to be through the Tauentzienstrasse, lined on three or four long blocks with large specialty shops. Their façades had been efficiently reduced to rubble, their huge display windows shattered, their mannequins and merchandise scattered on the sidewalk. Evidently more Jewish-owned stores had survived the government's efforts to "Aryanize" them than I had imagined. I kept my head down and bicycled home. The aloofness I had cultivated for so long did me good service that morning. When I reached my apartment house, I met the superintendent's wife at the front door, crying. I asked her what was wrong, and she told me that "they" had come and taken away our neighbor, Herr Schreiber. I parked my bike and rushed upstairs. My father was not there, but my mother told me that he was safe. He was with his friend Emil Busse, a gentile who had worked for him in his crystal and china business.

I found out many years later from Busse just what the two friends had done that morning: they had sauntered through the heart of the city to inspect the damage, just two Berliners on a stroll. The scene that most appalled them was the assault on a small hotel on the Spree River, one of the few hostelries still owned by a Jew. The mob had gone through the place methodically floor by floor, breaking all the windows, bursting into the rooms to demolish the furniture, slicing open blankets and pillowcases and throwing heaps of feathers into the street below. It was a barbarous snowstorm, a collective orgy that was hard to believe and impossible to forget. My father never mentioned this walk to me, nor did we dwell on the pogrom at home. But when I later asked Busse how my

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father had conducted himself during their "casual" walk, he told me that he had been calm and self-possessed. I can well believe it, but I also believe that at this moment a determination was born in him to do anything, no matter how illegal, to get his family away from the German nightmare.

Reassured about my father's whereabouts, I decided to do some reconnoitering, unconsciously imitating his actions that day, as well as his determination not to give way to panic. I thought grimly of the one lesson I had learned at the dental technician's: it seemed as though the cold water of my acquired public habits gave me some temporary protection against what I was seeing. I walked over to my cousin Edgar's house. The family was there, in misery, my aunt tight-lipped, my uncle weeping. This was not the way my parents or I would respond, but after I saw what had happened to the notions store they owned, it struck me that they had good cause to lament. It was pure chaos. If there was ever a commercial establishment that might invite hoodlums to do some enjoyable trashing, it was "Fröhlich" on the Olivaerplatz. Its waist-high glass counters, which held stockings, gloves, and ladies' underwear, had proved irresistible; they had been smashed and their contents savagely torn to pieces. But the wall cabinets had given the wrathful German people an even more entertaining target. One of the cabinets, well over five feet tall, with an array of shallow glass-fronted drawers, had held innumerable fine shadings of thread; the other, quite as high and as minutely subdivided, had contained buttons, with a sample sewn onto the front of each drawer. Both had been ripped from the wall and emptied pell-mell, their contents mingling with glass fragments strewn all over the floor.

Many years later I happened upon a contemporary account, a diary entry of November 12 by a young woman who took a walk through this quarter of Berlin two days earlier and came upon the Olivaerplatz. Her account confirms my memory of devastation in every detail. Although it does not identify the store by name, it can only have been the Fröhlich shop. It looked "desolate," the diarist reported, "the window pane smashed into atoms, the shirts, underwear, and stockings shredded and strewn across the broken glass, the shelves overturned, the cash register demolished apparently by hammer blows."

The rest of November 10 is a blank to me. After my tour of inspection I must have gone home and eaten dinner with my mother. By the end of the day, one thing was plain: our timetable for leaving Germany would have to be speeded up, drastically.

With an effrontery calculated to reduce the Jews of Germany to helpless rage, the Nazis first committed the atrocities of Kristallnacht and then promptly blamed the victims. To transfer culpability from the guilty to the innocent is a time-honored technique, but the rulers of the Third Reich took to it with a zest that astonished even seasoned students

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of politics. Psychoanalysts have a technical term for drastic reversals of the truth: *projection,* unconscious stratagems that burden others with the flaws or hateful desires one senses in oneself. But this diagnostic term does not apply to the criminals of November 1938. They knew perfectly well what they were doing and relished it. Liberated from all constraints by the craven conduct of the Western powers and supremely cavalier about world opinion, they brazenly reversed the truth.

On November 12, Göring convened a meeting of the Nazi leadership to canvass the position it should take after the damage had been done. With Göring and Goebbels showing themselves, as the latter put it, the most "radical," one after another of the participants put anti-Semitic proposals to the group. They were trying, as Peter Loewenberg has observed, to trump previous speakers: Jews were to be forbidden access to theaters or movie houses; Jews were to be assigned their own compartments on trains (unless the train was full, in which case, Göring suggested, they should stay home); Jews were to be identified by a special uniform; Jews were to pay a collective fine of one billion marks. These men were playing quite literally with people's lives. That very day, though some of these rabid wishes would have to wait, several of them were fulfilled: the fine was officially imposed; the few remaining Jewish stores were closed or forcibly "Aryanized"; Jews were forbidden to attend concerts, films, and exhibitions. And, as if to certify their cynicism, the participants in this conclave decided that Jewish victims of Kristallnacht not only would be forbidden to claim reimbursement from their insurance companies but were to pay for, and clean up, the havoc the Nazi marauders had wrought. On the next day, Goebbels recorded his triumph in his diary and crowed over the victims' plight: "190 synagogues burned down and destroyed. That hit them where it hurt—*das hat gesessen.*"

In the immediate aftermath of Kristallnacht, my father, after taking his terrible walk through Berlin, boarded with Emil Busse for a few days until it seemed that the "action" was over. Once he came home, we redoubled our efforts, already intense, to find a haven. We did what nearly everyone else in our predicament was doing: we wrote more letters, we visited more consulates, we filled out more forms. We hoped for England. The United States seemed out of reach for the foreseeable future, given the unbending limitations of the American quota system and the many thousands who were ahead of us in line. We had our rich relatives, Onkel Alfred and Aunt Grace, and they had vouched that none of us would ever become a public burden. This was the famous affidavit—the indispensable document for anyone aiming to enter the United States legally. But for all our relatives' goodwill, all their money, and all their exertions, they could not remove the obstacles to our joining them soon.

My father's inclusion in the Polish rather than the German quota was

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just one more example of how lives could hinge on political deals or bureaucratic decisions, often ones that had been made years before. He had been born in that narrow sliver of Silesian territory turned over to Poland in the peace treaties following the First World War. American law specified that a petitioner for admission to the United States must be classified not by birth or citizenship but by the country to which his birthplace belonged at the time of the application. According to American immigration authorities, then, my father was a Pole, one of fewer than six thousand to be eligible each year. That this provision of the law was sheer nonsense—my father was no more a Pole than I—made no difference.

These were anxious days. The civilized world professed deep indignation, even outrage, at the November pogrom. Protestant and Catholic clergy in country after country thundered against it from the pulpit and said prayers for the victims, editorial writers searched for heated adjectives, politicians (especially those with Jewish constituents to think about) bravely shouted themselves hoarse about German iniquity. It all sounded very good to us, and completely hollow. None of this verbal onslaught led to the action we needed: a place to go. There were ugly scenes at the German border, some of them faithfully reported by Radio Strasbourg, which had become indispensable to us. At the Dutch frontier, as frenzied German Jews pleaded for asylum literally on their knees, the government doubled its border patrol to keep out all the Nazis' victims; not that the Dutch approved of the pogrom, but the Netherlands was loath to irritate its big, muscle-rippling neighbor. The Dutch were to learn in May 1940 that this appeasement would not spare them a Nazi invasion.

Aware how little the world seemed to care but intent on not giving up, we waited for word from the consulates we had besieged; at the same time, we waited to hear from those who had been dragged to concentration camps the morning of November 10 to be blackmailed, bullied, starved, physically abused, and in some places tortured. A few weeks later, most of these prisoners began to drift back home. Their path to deliverance was paved with the promise that they could emigrate expeditiously to a guaranteed place of refuge; others were released because the commandant had decided, for whatever capricious reasons, to let them go. The camps were pigsties awash in savage excesses consistent with the humiliation rituals that had started with Kristallnacht. The guards were arbitrary, harsh, often sadistic; they beat their prisoners, kept them freezing and hungry, commanded them to perform impossible tasks, and then punished those unable to carry them out. The emphasis was on filth: inmates had trouble finding water to clean themselves, and many of them were compelled to stand in their own shit, a posture not only disgusting but unsafe; many inmates suffered from serious diarrhea. These were not extermination camps, but the guards exterminated a

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number even so. Suicide was a common way out for the captives. Some died; some went mad; more came back mental wrecks. All bore the stigma of being treated worse than animals.

One of the hapless victims of this beastliness was Herr Schreiber, whom I happened to encounter in early December not far from our house. He had visibly aged, looked deathly pale, seemed disoriented, I thought almost senile. Our conversation was all too brief; it was almost as though he could not bear to talk to anyone, even me, at any length. He did tell me that he and his family would go to Shanghai, at that time literally the only place in the world that would admit immigrants without requiring papers or fees. But even this beckoning refuge, halfway across the world, was not open to everyone. The passage was out of reach for Jews, whom the Third Reich had fleeced for years and further bankrupted by its post-Kristallnacht exactions. For too many German Jews, safety was a seductive mirage, ever receding the closer they thought they were approaching it.

One scene from those days remains anchored in my mind as though it had taken place only a few hours ago. It is the twenty-fourth of December, 1938. I am trying on a winter coat my parents have had custom-made for me, by far the most luxurious piece of clothing I have ever owned, a solid dark gray wool with two rows of substantial buttons weighing on my shoulders with authority. It is a coat for the English winter. Plainly, the notion of a refuge in some subtropical land had not yet entered their minds when they ordered it. As I stand there in my protective shell, the bell rings; it is the mailman with a letter from the British consulate. My heart beating, I watch my father open it: a refusal, polite but final, to grant us permission to settle in Great Britain. I can reexperience my dismay even now as I write; then I needed all my carefully cultivated self-control, supported by my parents' presence, to keep from breaking down.

For all my self-discipline, I was discovering that this steady flow of rejections was having a noticeable effect on me. I had short bouts of depression, enough for me to notice. My parents noticed them, too, and made me go to a doctor—a Jewish doctor, of course. I explained my symptoms, especially one that was troubling me a great deal: I noticed that I was, as it were, steadily watching myself, as though a double were sitting on my shoulder and commenting on, or criticizing, what I was saying or thinking or feeling. All spontaneity seemed to have drained from me. The doctor listened sympathetically and told me that I had an inferiority complex. I had never heard of such an ailment and protested vigorously that I did not feel inferior to anyone; my parents had taught me that I was as good as anyone else, no matter what the Nazi liars said. I did not convince him, but he gave me hope: once I was out of the country, he thought, I would surely feel better.

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After the British turned us down, we had only one scenario left: to secure asylum in the New World. But would we reach it in time? I do not believe that we ever discussed the Shanghai option: the nearer to our American relatives we could settle, the better it would be. Our correspondence with them was far more frequent now; it remained businesslike but grew increasingly Aesopian. There was so much we wanted to say and to know, but both desires were largely frustrated by the feared blue pencil of the censor. Understatement was safer and in any event suited the family style. Short communiqués, dealing calmly with practical matters, thus crossed the Atlantic at least once a week. We heard only later about the discussions that our American relatives were having on our behalf with influential political acquaintances. Together they agreed that there was not a chance of putting our affidavit to use in the near future. My cousin Edgar and his parents, all on the German quota, might enter the United States fairly quickly. But my father's "Polishness" meant that we might have to wait for years, far too long for sanity or even survival.

A glance back at the American political climate at the time suggests that this pessimism was justified. Too many forces were arrayed against opening the door to the proverbial land of immigrants any wider. The position that President Roosevelt, whom we idolized, took on this sensitive issue was of necessity complex. He denounced Kristallnacht in a strongly worded statement on November 15; three days later he announced that he was taking advantage of a loophole to order an extension of the visitors' visas held by well over twelve thousand German refugees. But he announced that he would not ask for what he could not get. Public opinion was ill informed, still strongly isolationist, only too indifferent to crises far away; and Americans were skeptical of horror stories, even true ones, reminiscent of the Allies' mendacious anti-German propaganda in the First World War about Huns spearing Belgian babies on their bayonets. In the light of such opposition, Onkel Alfred and his family would have to buy us asylum in one of the Latin American countries now trading visas for money. Their solution, after shopping around, was Cuba.

This was only a short first stage on the race to freedom. After Kristallnacht, the Nazis invented ever new sources of blackmail beyond the billion-mark "penalty," exactions that Jews had to meet before they could obtain a passport. Jewish families were obliged to surrender their jewelry, including their wedding rings, silver, and other valuables. To turn the screws even more tightly, the regime ordained that while Jews were struggling to meet all these extortionate demands, they must show proof of admission to another country—any country—and of guaranteed passage. And in order to impose some semblance of order on the crush of German Jews trying to flee what was no longer their homeland, the Nazis

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decreed that potential emigrants must show a certificate of passage dated less than a month ahead before they could apply for a passport.

These shakedowns for a crime we had not committed roused my father's combative impulses to new heights. Before we could run the gauntlet of officials who would at the end reward us with our ticket to freedom, he needed several signed pieces of paper proving that we had given up what the government had ordered us to give up. He procured them all by illegal and risky means. With the assistance of his friend Emil Busse, he made up a package, filled it with some heavy material, and turned it in at the post office, declaring it to be my mother's jewels and our silverware. I am not sure just how he got a receipt that would be impossible to trace to him—I failed to ask him how he managed this feat, and by the early 1950s, when such matters began to interest me strongly, he was too ill to recall; nor could Busse, for all his splendid memory, reconstruct the method. But my father did make it happen, and how he accomplished it remains one of the conundrums of my early life that I shall never solve.

This certificate was, of course, one of the critical documents we needed before we could subject ourselves to the bureaucrats holding us at ransom for our passports. My father somehow did not believe that he could smuggle our valuables abroad, and so, with full confidence, he turned my mother's rings and necklaces and our silver over to Busse. One can hardly ask a fifteen-year-old boy to pay attention to such trivia as his mother's jewels, but I had handled the silver often enough to remember it well. It was a plain, handsome pattern with narrow ornamentation around the edges—the knives, forks, and soup spoons unusually heavy, beautifully balanced, and a pleasure to handle; the coffee spoons and dessert forks, in contrast, small and delicate. I had no idea how much all this was worth, but it seemed to me that it must be valuable indeed.

Busse proved indispensable to us in another way. Like me, my father was a philatelist, and over the years his stamp collection had become a major piece of property that contained some rare items. The stamps would be permitted to leave the country only if their value did not exceed a certain amount. Accordingly, taking Busse with him, my father visited a stamp dealer who was also a government functionary to have his collection appraised. As the dealer went through the collection methodically, item by item, noting down the totals and moving the stamps from one pile to another, my father, with Busse's connivance, kept him occupied with philatelic chatter; whenever the appraiser turned away to consult a specialized catalog, he shoved a few stamps from the first pile to the second. The dealer seemed not to notice the irregular goings-on and certified my father's collection as not too valuable to be exported. I have often wondered whether he was lax, dim-witted, or decent at heart; in a

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country where arbitrariness is king, it was from such incidents that fortunes were made and lost, lives saved and doomed.

There remained the question of transporting the stamp collection to the United States, where my father hoped it might serve as the foundation of our future prosperity. (It did not.) Anxious lest his collection might be confiscated at the last moment by some capricious customs official, my father hit on an ingenious plan. It did justice to his sardonic sense of humor, which the past six years had not erased but had laced with bitterness. For many years he had been a moderate smoker, buying a brand made by Reemstma. To make its product even more appealing, the firm enclosed a coupon numbered from 1 to 50 in each box. Once a smoker had gathered a certain number of complete runs, he could order a handsome album from an array of offerings with ample commentary and empty squares into which pictures, supplied by Reemstma separately in neat packs, would fit. Now, early in 1939, my father sent for such an album and chose a history of the Nazi Party, a volume that stank of self-satisfied and self-aggrandizing propaganda for the prehistory of the Third Reich. With grim satisfaction, he placed a stamp in the center of each square and pasted the photograph over it, carefully confining the glue to its four corners. He then mailed this hidden little fortune to my Onkel Alfred at ordinary book rate, only alerting him that a present from Germany would soon arrive. I still cherish the day in 1941 when my father and I opened this gift, which had arrived in America intact. We delicately peeled each photograph away to rescue the stamp underneath, and then threw the brown-covered album and the pictures of marching brownshirts and grinning Nazi thugs into the garbage.

In January 1939, my cousin Edgar and his parents left for Cuba. Our turn was next; our visas to Cuba seemed to be in order and we had complied with exit regulations—in our own rather peculiar way. What remained was to find passage. With the help of an old friend, my father made what seemed like the best possible choice. He secured reservations on a large Hapag luxury liner, the *St. Louis,* which was due to sail to Havana on May 13. This meant that by mid-April we could apply for our passports.

It was now the end of March, only two weeks from holding that prize in our hands. But my father was not content with these arrangements. Whether he was making restitution for failing to organize our emigration in the early days of the Third Reich or feared that the regime might think up new torments for German Jews in the next few weeks, he resolved to hasten our departure, no matter how hazardous the maneuvers this would force him to execute. Time was short. All we had was our tickets on the *St. Louis.* Aware of the gamble, yet persuaded that every day spent in Germany was a day of danger, he staked everything on booking

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earlier passage on another Hapag steamer. He found what he wanted in the *Iberia,* scheduled to sail on April 27, two weeks before the *St. Louis.*

Two weeks! It seemed like a very short time, but not to my father. Yet finding space for us on the *Iberia* was not enough: we still held our tickets on the *St. Louis.* There was no time to exchange documents. In this emergency, he decided to doctor our certificate of passage and substitute the new date and the name of the new ship for the old. The certificate looked and felt like a sham parchment printed in old-fashioned Gothic lettering. This was easier for a forger to work with than thin paper, but not really heavy enough to permit the clean rewriting he wanted. I can still see him at work committing this crime: using a straight razor, he gently scratched away at the ink, with *"St. Louis"* and "May 13" growing paler and paler. Little fragments of brownish paper pilled up under his fingers. To prevent the ink of his new entries from running, he smoothed with his thumbnail the surface he had roughened, and with slow strokes, trying to imitate the bureaucratic handwriting he had erased, he inserted his substitutes. Had someone noticed, I think we would never have left the country alive, but no one questioned the document when we three confronted Nazi officialdom.

As my passport attests, our final appearance before the regime's emigration bureaucracy took place on April 7. The Nazis had appropriated a Jewish community center to serve as a collective bureau. We had to wend our way to a large anteroom, where we stood crowded together with other supplicants, all as eager and as nervous as we were. Through an open door we could see a grand office with a desk in the middle and a self-important brownshirt sitting behind it. More than once, as the crowd waiting to be admitted grew too large to handle and a few people standing at the front were pushed into his sanctuary, the brownshirt yelled at us to get back, and all of us, intimidated and in no mood to argue, retreated in haste. Cowed as we already were, these displays of insolence, which could only cow us further, served just one purpose: to show off one man's power over the powerless. I resented this man beyond words, all the more because, however strong my vengeful impulses, I was in no position to act on them. My fantasies must have been lurid and bloody in the extreme: my inability to feel rage, which for so long had bedeviled me, never stopped me from hating the guts of the swine who were lording it over us.

Once we got past this Aryan guardian into the building's central space, which was as large as a ballroom, we saw desks all round its periphery. We were told to stop at each of them to have yet another form checked and stamped. The procedure took far less time and proved far less exacting than we had feared; by the end of the morning we were ready to go upstairs to an office where our passports would be issued. At that point, however, perverse nature threw an unforeseen hurdle into

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our path: my father had a kidney-stone attack. This was not the first time or the second; he had suffered from this excruciating affliction for years. My mother had learned to administer shots, and we had a supply of morphine ampules at home, given us (illegally) by our physician. An attack, its course, and its alleviation were all perfectly familiar to us. But now, on April 7, 1939? Did we not have better things to do? I have never really wavered from my atheism, but it occurred to me that if there really was a God, he was showing his true colors—pure malice—that day.

We took a taxi home, my mother gave my father two shots just to be on the safe side, and we returned for our passports as though nothing had happened. It was a ludicrous episode, but whatever humor it contains emerged only in long retrospect. As the bureaucrat put the finishing touches on our documents while we sat across his desk, my father, whom we had thoughtfully put between us, kept falling asleep. We would poke him gently and he would make an unsuccessful effort to stay awake. But nothing went wrong, and we departed clutching our passports, conspicuously disfigured by the red "J" on the first page.

All that remained was to sell our belongings and pack a few of our things into whatever luggage we could manage to take along. I recall a standing suitcase, green with brass trimmings, a small edition of a steamer trunk. We took the train to Hamburg and boarded the *Iberia,* leaving the country with the customary ten marks apiece (just $2.50 in those days) and a small crate in which we were allowed to pack whatever we prized most. We chose a handful of books, including a three-volume edition of plays by the once well-known playwright Curt Goetz and the tattered copy of *Saint Joan,* my first English book. More substantial was some fine china and crystal that my father had collected with his professional eye to high quality: a hand-painted porcelain clock in dazzling cobalt blue as a present for my Aunt Grace; a splendid large crystal plate deeply and intricately incised, literally a masterpiece that an apprentice had carved as proof of his competence. Nowadays, my wife and I bring out this wonder, at once a poignant reminder and an aesthetic delight, whenever we want a particularly handsome display for fruit on our dining table.

Just before we left I had a considerable shock, very personal and, most people would say, trifling. Our mahogany buffet, the repository of my favorite secrets and my favorite food, turned out to be less monumental than I had always imagined it to be. I learned to my dismay when the two men from the moving company quite unceremoniously lifted off the top and carried it out on its own that it was not a single, truly massive whole. I felt as though an old friend had betrayed me. Apparently nothing was stable or reliable in my world.

Our voyage on the *Iberia* was perfectly uneventful. The captain and

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the crew treated us not as undesirable inferiors being shipped off to tropical exile but as valued passengers. They even issued one of those festive little booklets listing the names of everyone aboard. We leaned back in our deck chairs like ordinary tourists, breathing in the bracing sea air, taking naps in the sun, obediently drinking our bouillon when it was bouillon-drinking time. In my meticulous way I charted our progress by drawing a map recording our brief stays at Antwerp, Southampton, Cherbourg, and Lisbon, each passing day marked by a flag. I decorated the sheet with a photograph of the three of us on board and an inscription with a rather obvious pun on our name: *"Dies ist eine unbestreitbar Fröhliche Familie"* (This is indisputably a cheerful family).

We did not exult. Trained to discretion, we kept quiet on that journey, mindful that we were still in German territory. We need not have worried; no one in the crew misbehaved. Then, finally, on May 13: Havana and freedom. I was almost sixteen years old. On my map I drew a flag larger than the others, decorated with the laconic word *"Ziel"*: Goal. But even then I knew that my real goal was elsewhere. I drew an arrow northward from Cuba, pointing toward the United States. We did not reach that goal until after another year and a half of impatient waiting.

We had barely settled into Havana when I, and the entire refugee community in Cuba, endured a new shock. On May 27, the *St. Louis*—"our" ship before my father "found" earlier passage for us on the *Iberia*—steamed into Havana harbor, with 907 German-Jewish refugees aboard. All of them had bought their landing permits just as we had, but, caught in grim political infighting in Cuba, they were denied entrance, and after days of agonizing negotiations, the ship was turned away. A return to Germany meant a certain ticket to a concentration camp, and Jewish relief organizations made frantic efforts to find asylum for these hapless wanderers. Then at last, four countries—Britain, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands—offered to take a quarter of the refugees each. The fate of most of them was to become part of the "final solution." Of the 623 refugees given asylum on the Continent, only about forty survived the war. If I had been on that ship, would I have ended up an American citizen, an American family man, an American professor? The odds would have been against it.

I did not return to Germany until 1961. I had revisited Europe three times before, but each time I had refused to enter the country of my birth. Finally, when my wife and I were on vacation in France, a colleague from Columbia University invited us to hear him lecture at the Free University in West Berlin, and I decided that I was ready to go back. I had left in 1939 as Peter Israel Fröhlich; I returned twenty-two years later as Peter Jack Gay, proud American citizen. It was a beneficent transformation that I virtually sensed in my bones, as if my American passport made

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me a little taller. The depressing sense of total vulnerability before implacable Nazi officialdom had given way to a feeling of power. When my parents and I emigrated, we were fleeing for our lives. Now (I told myself) I could stay in Germany as long as it pleased me or, if something rubbed me the wrong way, I could leave without having to pay ransom or endure the chicanery at which the Nazis had proved so inventive.

But the moment our rented Dauphine crossed the Rhine Bridge from Strasbourg to Kehl and touched German soil, I regretted that I had come. My American self-confidence was apparently not yet solid enough to let me relax among Germans, or let me look forward to seeing the houses where I had spent my earliest years, the parks where I had played, the schools where I had recited, the stadiums where I had cheered.

Getting out of the car on the German side to exchange dollars for marks at a little kiosk, I faced a young woman clerk behind a grille, ready to serve me. She looked at me coldly, her eyes registering pure hatred as I handed her my passport. A glance at her left no doubt in my mind: murderous anti-Semitism was alive and flourishing in my native land.

What had happened? Nothing. The clerk dealt with me as she dealt with everyone: correctly and impersonally. If there was any expression in her eyes, I now believe that it was boredom. I did not know the word *projection* then, nor would it have helped me to thaw out antagonisms so long frozen in my mind. The fact was that this clerk did not hate me; she barely registered my existence. I hated her.

The story does not end here; it will end only with the end of my life. For my feelings about Germany, once slowly unfrozen, do not, and will not, stand still. The pleasure of good German friends, the sheer passage of time, the pressure of historical discriminations do not permit the simplistic judgments I lived with for so long. My German question is not so puzzling or disheartening as it has been, but I do not think I shall ever answer it completely.

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JOHN UPDIKE

Atlanta–Dallas/Fort Worth, 11:10 P.M.

The plane looked empty as I entered, but
it slowly filled, even some middle seats.
Who could be flying, so blearily late,
from hub to hub, New South to New West?

Then came a flood, ten minutes to departure,
of teenage girls, all white, most blond, in white
sweatshirts that, like plumage in nature,
meaningfully matched. "Drill team," confided

someone in earshot. "Competition in
Orlando." Sure enough, a man—a coach—
carried a spiky trophy, gilded tin.
Victorious competitors, the girls

kept pressing down the aisle with heated cheeks,
banishing our hopes of sleep with adolescent
giggling, boy-talk, camaraderie—
tongues faster than hummingbird wings, their health

an astonishment, wave on wave, shoving
into the plane's back crannies, all seats seized
by the flood, ninety-seven bodies, someone
had heard, fresh flesh and blood, this flushed drill team.

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Slowly they quieted down. Their giggles
sank into the drone of the engines; our
drowsiness absorbed their triumphal
presence in our midst this midnight hour,

their pink membranes, their delicacy of
eyelid, lash, and tooth, their strands of hair
uncountable and glossy, the film of fat
presaging womanhood, their dewy brains.

At one, mid-Texas time, another shock:
We disembarked into another mob—
parents, brandishing jackets, snacks, and names.
How fierce they seemed, rabid to claim their own!

Our ship of girls broke up on shoals of love;
the airport emptied quicker than a tide.

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Slum Lords

JOHN UPDIKE

The superrich make lousy neighbors—
they buy a house and tear it down
and build another, twice as big, and leave.
They're never there; they own so many
other houses, each demands a visit.
Entire neighborhoods called fashionable,
bustling with servants and masters, such as
Louisburg Square in Boston or Bel Air in L.A.,
are districts now like Wall Street after dark
or Tombstone once the silver boom went bust.
The essence of the superrich is absence.
They're always demonstrating they can afford
to be somewhere else. Don't let them in.
Their money is a kind of poverty.

John Updike's most recent volumes of verse are *Collected Poems 1953–1993* and *A Helpful Alphabet of Friendly Objects.*

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American Antiquity

How DeWitt Clinton Invented Our Past

EVAN CORNOG

One of the great constants of American intellectual life has been our nation's grudging sense of inferiority to Europe. Today this defensiveness has almost disappeared, but in the first century of the Republic's existence it was felt painfully by all who aspired to partake of the life of the mind. It was worst, of course, for artists and writers. Some, like Benjamin West, migrated across the Atlantic and found royal patronage. Others, like Nathaniel Hawthorne, sampled Europe's charms but returned home to America. Hawthorne, after visiting Italy, wondered how a novelist could practice his trade in a nation with "no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity, in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the case in my dear native land."

Hawthorne's plaint was published in 1860, and within a year the Civil War was providing the "picturesque and gloomy wrong" that had (in his mind at least) been lacking. But no amount of American striving could supply the other missing element, "antiquity." Mountains, rivers, waterfalls, these America had in abundance, but there was not a Roman aqueduct or Athenian temple to be found. Was there anything to be done about this tragic lack of past? One man who desperately wanted an affirmative answer—and who, by a combination of erudition and self-delusion, willed himself into believing he had found it—was DeWitt Clinton.

Evan Cornog has taught history at Columbia University, written for *The New Yorker*, and served as Mayor Edward Koch's press secretary. He is Associate Dean at Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism. This essay was adapted from *The Birth of Empire: DeWitt Clinton and the American Experience, 1769–1828*, forthcoming from Oxford University Press.

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Clinton, who lived from 1769 to 1828, served as a United States senator, as mayor of New York City and governor of New York State, and in a number of lesser offices. Running as the peace candidate in the presidential election of 1812, he narrowly lost to James Madison. His most famous achievement was the construction of the Erie Canal, but he also played a central role in the development of party politics and helped create the New York City public school system. Clinton was involved in politics and government from his late teens and held public office almost without interruption for the last three decades of his life, yet in spite of his public duties he devoted a vast amount of energy to an entirely different realm, that of scholarship. He published papers on ichthyology, botany, archaeology, anthropology, entomology, and geology. He corresponded with the leading intellectual lights of the United States and Europe. He used his prestige and his positions to further the cultural life of the city, the state, and the nation, and constantly strove to win public support for education and scientific research. He helped to found the New-York Historical Society, the American Academy of the Arts, and the Literary and Philosophical Society, all attempts to set American intellectual life on a firm European foundation.

The English-speaking world of the late eighteenth century, in which Clinton was raised, was saturated with the ideas and images of the classical world, as filtered through British culture. In the Hudson Valley academy that Clinton attended, students (even those with a dubious command of spelling and grammar) debated such matters as "Whether was Ajax or Ilissees most advantage to the Grecians" and "Did Brutus do right in killing Cesar?" The political pamphlets that helped ignite the American Revolution were often signed with classical pseudonyms, and when a critic of George III signed himself "Brutus" or "Cato" or "Aristides," the better-educated members of colonial society readily understood the classical allusion. And the political ideas contained in those pamphlets owed much to the examples of the ancient republics of Greece and Rome. The buildings the young Republic erected to house its courts, banks, churches, colleges, and legislatures borrowed heavily from classical architecture, following the architectural fashions of Europe, which had been inspired to a new classicism by the discoveries at Pompeii and Herculaneum in the middle of the eighteenth century. Sculptors often clothed the Founding Fathers in classical garb, and in the fall of 1825, when DeWitt Clinton rode a canal boat from Buffalo to New York to celebrate the opening of the Erie Canal, the boat's cabin was graced with a George Catlin portrait of him wearing a toga.

The boat itself, however, was called the *Seneca Chief,* and it is at the intersection of Rome and the world of the Native Americans that Clinton made his most original, and most poignant, attempt to claim for the United States a classical past worthy of European respect.

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Clinton's cultural agenda, from the organizations he founded to the essays he wrote, was aimed at a European audience as much as at his fellow New Yorkers. The American sense of cultural inferiority was, after all, gleefully encouraged by Europeans. American pride was stung when the Reverend Sydney Smith asked in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1820, "Who reads an American book? Or goes to an American play? Or looks at an American picture or statue?"

Clinton felt this kind of transatlantic condescension keenly, and in his writings labored hard to demonstrate that culture could flourish under a republican government. Speaking to the American Academy of the Arts in 1816, he recommended that the artists present seek worthy native subjects. Consider, he urged, the American landscape: "This wild, romantic and awful scenery, is calculated to produce a correspondent impression on the imagination—to elevate all the faculties of the mind, and to exalt all the feelings of the heart." But the depiction of the Republic's heroes is also a fit subject: "The portrait collection of this city, by comprising many of the principal heroes of the country, is entitled to great praise in its tendency to stimulate noble deeds, and to encourage the Fine Arts."

To celebrate America, moreover, was to serve the cause of republicanism in the world. "A republican government," Clinton said, "instead of being unfriendly to the growth of the fine arts, is the appropriate soil for their cultivation." Monarchies, by contrast, "create a barrier against the ascent of genius to the highest stations, and they cast the most distinguished talents and the most exalted endowments in the back ground of society." The proof lay in the achievements of the Athenians. The Acropolis, he declared, is "the most interesting place on the globe" and demonstrates "the immortal honour, which a small republic has acquired, by the cultivation of the arts." A large republic could do the same, and America's cultural achievements should proclaim to the world the capacities and the refinement of its citizens as well as the superiority of republican government.

The crux of the matter was a close relationship between the arts and the citizenry. If "even the herb women of Athens could criticise the phraseology of Demosthenes, and the meanest artisan could pronounce judgment on the works of Apelles and Phidias," he asked, "what might not be expected from the well directed efforts of that wonderful nation?" Whether or not DeWitt Clinton would have welcomed criticisms of his own phraseology from herb women or anyone else in New York, he nevertheless found something admirable in the principle, and hoped the American Academy could spread such blessings here. He basked in his own sincerity as he declared that the wellsprings of art were in "the fertile soil that produces all good . . . the great body of the people."

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Clinton's vision of the nation's cultural potential did not always receive a sympathetic response from his fellow citizens, and many of his more ambitious proposals for culture and education went unrealized because frugal legislatures refused to fund them. Still, he persevered in what he clearly saw as a duty to serve as publicist for America's intellectual life. Nowhere did he make his case more clearly than in his 1814 *Introductory Discourse Delivered Before the Literary and Philosophical Society of New-York.*

In it, Clinton reviewed the case against America as presented by such European denigrators of the New World as the Comte de Buffon and the Scottish historian William Robertson, and he offered explanations for why American intellectual life had not yet equaled that of Europe. European condescension toward America had been rebuffed by others—Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia,* for example, had challenged Buffon's statements about the inferiority of North American mammals—but Clinton's counterattacks on Europe give the impression of a man responding to *personal* insults. He dismissed the writings of one Prussian observer of North America by commenting, "As a specimen of his accuracy it is sufficient to state, that he confidently asserts that dogs suffer so much under the deteriorating influence of our climate, that they lose the power of barking." Our climatic conditions, Clinton crowed, were in fact superior: "We have more rain, more evaporation, more sunshine, and a greater number of clear days than they have in Europe: our atmosphere . . . contains more electrical fluid; and we are exposed to greater extremes of heat and cold." So it was not meteorological factors that explained why "we are far behind our european brethren in the pursuits of literature." (He did have to admit that we were behind.) At the time the New World was settled, the European intellectual world "was involved in cimmerian darkness," and thus unable to shine much light on the New World; many of those who came to America were seeking riches, not knowledge; and there was "something in the nature of provincial government which tends to engender faction, and to prevent the expansion of intellect." With the early phase of settlement characterized by a "small population, scattered over an extensive country," and with even this small number "composed almost entirely of strangers to literature," cultural development was slow. This was only to be expected.

The winning of independence removed some obstacles and provided stirring subjects for American artists, but there were still hindrances. The difficulty, Clinton thought, lay not in the great mass of people, who, thanks to the educational reforms he had championed, were better educated than their European counterparts. The crucial shortcoming was in the elite: "There is not so much concentrated knowledge in so many individuals as in Europe." To make matters worse, Clinton continued,

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what intellectual life there was had been distracted by factional politics: "Our ingenuity has been employed, not in cultivating a vernacular literature, or increasing the stock of human knowledge; but in raising up and pulling down the parties which agitate the community. . . . The style of our political writings has assumed a character of rude invective, and unrestrained licentiousness . . . which has greatly tended to injure our national character." Other obstacles to intellectual life in the United States included a quarreling medical profession, an undistinguished legal tradition, and the fact that "the energies of our country have been more directed to the accumulation of wealth than to the acquisition of knowledge."

Yet in spite of these obstacles, Americans had achieved much that was worthy of European recognition. Clinton pointed proudly to Benjamin Franklin's experiments and inventions, Samuel Latham Mitchill's work in chemistry and geology, David Hosack's botanical research, Alexander Wilson's ornithological writings, David Rittenhouse's astronomy, and Zebulon Pike's explorations. Their achievements should inspire others.

"Men of observation and science ought to be employed," Clinton urged, "to explore our country with a view to its geology, mineralogy, botany, zoölogy, and agriculture." Moreover, despite the continent's seemingly limitless resources, he was already concerned with what might need to be done to replenish the forests, and conserve the fish and game, that might otherwise someday disappear. Clinton's environmental concerns, impressive for his time, arose in part from his interest in American Indians, a field in which he did the most sustained and original of all his scientific work. Two and a half years before his *Discourse* to the Literary and Philosophical Society, the New-York Historical Society heard a lengthy lecture from him on the subject of "The Iroquois," about whom he knew a great deal. In it he discussed the environmental conflict between Europeans and Indians, observing that "a nation that derives its subsistence, principally, from the forest, cannot live in the vicinity of one that relies on the products of the field." He also noted that the former balance between the Iroquois and their natural domain had been disrupted even before European settlers took over their lands, because from the earliest days of contact the Indians had been encouraged to hunt certain animals, such as beavers, to supply overseas markets, and had thus killed more than they would have had they been hunting only for subsistence.

Within Clinton's own lifetime the Iroquois had declined from a formidable political, diplomatic, military, and economic force in New York to a much more tenuous presence, and the process had been completed by the westward expansion that accompanied the Erie Canal. While Clinton did not intend to let anything—even solicitude for the state's Indians—

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get in the way of his own expansionist visions, he displayed a greater interest in and respect for their culture and customs than almost any other white person in the state. Indeed, as the historian Jonathan Harris has noted, his investigations and theories about the continent's Indian past represent perhaps "the first archaeological studies ever carried out by an American on an American subject."

Yet, for all the subject's Americanness, Clinton found himself carried away by the possibility of Roman analogies and precedents in North America. The Iroquois, he observed, might themselves be called "the Romans of this western world," on account of the vast size of the area they controlled, their martial temper, the eloquence of their oratory, and their tendency to absorb rather than execute those they conquered.

While it was a common conceit that the Indians of North America were the degenerate remnants of the lost tribes of Israel (William Penn and Roger Williams both espoused this view), Clinton rejected the theory in favor of Asiatic origins and a possible link to the ancient Scythians. Citing Herodotus's description of the Scythians' cruelty as warriors, he believed that from them "we may derive the practice of scalping . . . and it is not improbable, considering the maritime skill and distant voyages of the Phoenicians and Carthaginians, that America derives part of its population from that source by water, as it undoubtably has from the north-east parts of Asia by land."

This preoccupation with the European past, and the example of Rome, went deeper than analogies to Roman character and possible American odysseys by Scythians, Carthaginians, and Phoenicians. DeWitt Clinton was so thoroughly steeped in the saga of Rome that he could not help believing that a similar story of a high civilization overwhelmed by invading barbarians had taken place in North America. Nor was he alone in such notions; his correspondence is dotted with letters from others pursuing the same theme. The idea received its fullest and most influential elaboration in the revelations of a pre-Columbian struggle in what is now western New York between an advanced civilization and a tribe of savages—both descended from the Israelites—recorded by Joseph Smith as the *Book of Mormon.*

Clinton announced this theme at the end of his address on the Iroquois:

> It would be an unpardonable omission not to mention, while treating on this subject, that there is every reason to believe, that previous to the occupancy of this country by the progenitors of the present nations of Indians, it was inhabited by a race of men much more populous and much further advanced in civilization. The numerous remains of ancient fortifications which are found in this country, commencing principally near the Onondaga River, and from thence

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> spreading . . . over the territory adjoining the Ohio and its tributary streams, the country on Lake Erie, and extending even west of the Mississippi, demonstrate a population far exceeding that of the Indians when this country was first settled.

He had seen several such remains, he declared, in the appropriately Roman-named towns of Pompey, Camillus, and Scipio, among others. (Clinton says little about his archaeological methods, and he appears mostly to have walked around various ancient mounds, observing but not excavating them. Around Pompey, he examined "bones of animals, ashes, carbonized beans or grains of Indian corn.") He supported these observations with a footnote that fills half a page in small type. He reviewed some possible explanations—that these ancient forts might be remnants of early Spanish or French exploration or of the legendary expedition of the Welsh voyager Madoc (whose twelfth-century journey, described in Hakluyt's *Voyages,* had been the subject of a recent epic poem by Robert Southey, the poet laureate of England and one of Clinton's favorite authors).

But Clinton dismissed all such theories of European origin for these ruins, and briskly announced that it is "equally clear that they were not the work of the Indians." One bit of evidence for the antiquity of the sites was the great age of trees found growing on the ramparts of one of the forts. (Clinton had had a tree sawn in half so he could count the rings.) Describing two lines of forts running parallel to the southern shore of Lake Erie, he argued that the two lines marked successive shorelines and that the retreat of the water in the lake could only have happened over centuries. Thus, the origin of the oldest line of forts "must be sought in a very remote age." Clinton's theory was that a high civilization had been evolved by peoples who formed the earliest wave of migration from Asia (he seemed to have forgotten the Scythians by this point), and that after their journey to the eastern end of North America, they enjoyed a long period of stability, during which they were at leisure to "devote themselves to the arts of peace, make rapid progress in civilization, and acquire an immense population." Here, then, was the American Rome. Eventually, barbarous migrants arriving from Asia threatened the frontiers of this gentle and accomplished people:

> At last, they became alarmed by the irruption of a horde of barbarians, who rushed like an overwhelming flood from the North of Asia.
>
> A multitude, like which the populous North
> Pour'd never from her frozen loins, to pass
> *Rhene* or the *Danaw,* when her barbarous Sons
> Came like a Deluge on the South, and spread
> Beneath *Gibraltar* to the *Lybian* sands.

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In describing America's lost paradise, Clinton was, of course, quoting from *Paradise Lost.* He continued:

> The great law of self-preservation compelled them to stand on their defence, to resist these ruthless invaders, and to construct numerous and extensive works for protection. And for a long series of years the scale of victory was suspended in doubt, and they firmly withstood the torrent: but like the Romans, in the decline of their empire, they were finally worn down and destroyed by successive inroads and renewed attacks. And the fortifications of which we have treated are the only remaining monuments of these ancient and exterminated nations.

Clinton undoubtedly believed—he certainly very much *wanted* to believe—what he was saying here. He wanted to discover, if not to invent, some indigenous counterpart of the classical past. He wanted to believe that he had explored the ancient ruins of an advanced civilization, not the burial mounds and other works of earlier woodland Indians. And he also saw in the example of Rome a cautionary tale for the nation he was helping to build.

When Americans of Clinton's era attempted to envision their own destiny, the experience of the ancient republics—particularly that of the Roman republic—was a constant point of reference. Yet the Roman tradition, seen in its wholeness, embraced both republic and empire, and for some it was not always easy to keep them separate. Such was the case with DeWitt Clinton. His archaeological efforts, his intellectual aspirations, and his vision of the Erie Canal intimated that hopes for imperial glory might well accompany desires for a virtuous republican citizenry, and that the achievements of Great Britain, the mightiest imperial power of his time, should be an example that might compete with, but also complement, America's own strivings for greatness.

Yet a somber note intruded among Clinton's prophecies of an imperial destiny. America's future as a great civilization was certain, but the time might come when the bill would have to be paid. In his essay on the Iroquois, he pointed to the many crimes committed by Europeans and European Americans in the course of settling the continent. They had "exterminated millions of red men and entailed upon the sable inhabitants of Africa, endless wars, captivity, slavery and death." In some distant future, retribution might bring calamities upon Americans such as those "we have so wantonly and wickedly inflicted upon others." A "transcendent genius" might then arise in Asia, rally the nations there behind him, and lead an invasion of the United States. Clinton envisioned the contest:

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> The destinies of the country may then be decided on the waters of the Missouri, or on the banks of Lake Superior. And if Asia shall then revenge upon our posterity the injuries we have inflicted on her sons, a new, a long, and a gloomy night of gothic darkness will set in upon mankind. And when, after the efflux of ages, the returning effulgence of intellectual light shall again gladden the nations, then the wide-spread ruins of our cloud-capp'd towers, of our solemn temples, and of our magnificent cities, will, like the works of which we have treated, become the subject of curious research and elaborate investigation.

America would in the end have achieved a glory equal to that of Greece and Rome, with a civilization future ages might well contemplate with profit. A kind of final moral justice would then be consummated, and the speaker, in predicting it, outgrew his moment, and bravely contemplated a time when his own civilization—like the one he had willed into being—would be itself part of the glorious past.

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Losing It Again in Bozeman

WALTER McDONALD

Once, in Bozeman, we saw the truck coming,
an army convoy, a block of cars stopped
at the green light, state motorcycle cops
in boots and helmets looking back, revving,
ready to roar away. Then a flash of white
in the inside lane, an old couple with faces cocked
so they could see. If they saw the cops,
they didn't believe, rolling past toward the light
at the legal speed. Ten thousand times
they'd stopped on red, but gone on through on green—
but not then, a blast of shattered glass and screams.
The truck hit like a boulder crashing through ice,

crushing the car like a beer can kicked,
tumbling and spinning. I saw steam, but did they die?
Maybe they weren't even rushed, taking their time
passing the last stalled car, hearing the click
of seams in the concrete, all of it orderly,
careful, believing in signs. I can't recall driving on,
not another block. What makes the mind go numb,
stumbling about in the dark? Files I want to retrieve
are locked, password denied. Trying to tap a nerve,
I think of Fred decades ago, flat on his face on the floor,

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Montana hardwood holding him like a Tilt-a-Whirl,
the barkeep wiping his rag around as if he'd served

a thousand drunks. Why Bozeman? College boys
from Texas, hoping for summer work in Yellowstone.
I see a campus near the town, I smell cologne
but can't see faces, just names, *Fauncine* and *Joy.*
I don't know which I kissed, which one kneeled over
Fred, or left. I think that's how it happens, sudden
as a truck roaring with the right-of-way, or a drunk
in any town. I think I drove us back to Yellowstone,
but someone was lucky behind the wheel.
The jaws of life couldn't pry apart my mind,
that summer and that wreck. I think they died,
the flatbed loaded with tanks, the speed of steel

like a freight train. I remember a hubcap rolling
around and around like a roulette wheel,
like a hound whining, sniffing the street,
circling a turtle shut like a heart—the hubcap rolling
wire, wire wirewirewirewire and stopped,
the last sound I heard at the wreck, except steam.

Walter McDonald is Horn Professor of English at Texas Tech University. This poem is included in his forthcoming book of poems, *Blessings the Body Gave*, which received the Ohio State University Press / *The Journal* Award.

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The Gathering

Kelley, Iowa

CONSTANCE EGEMO

Prairie
is the best soil for burial,
an acre or two away from town.

There's no silence here not crowded
with the sound of bees,
cicadas, meadowlarks in summer
and all year 'round the many-voiced wind.

Listen, how it jostles
the elbows of the corn akimbo.
It blows through the long-needled pines
like the ghost of a child piping
with paper and comb.

At the iron fence it pauses,
lightly ruffling the wild roses by the gate.
You can barely feel it move
as it slips between the granite headstones
carved with the names of grandparents,
parents, uncles, aunts.

All children return to this place,
faithful and prodigal alike.
In this acre they're forgiven everything.
And the meadowlark, who knows nothing of death,
sings his song as sweetly for them
as he will for us.

Constance Egemo's poems have appeared in many literary journals, including *Yankee*, *Amicus*, and *National Forum*.

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Did Moby Dick Break Boyle's Law?

GRACE MARMOR SPRUCH

I read *Moby-Dick* when I was in college and loved it. I took chemistry when I was in college and hated it. What made the two converge sometime later I don't know—I no longer remember the trigger—but come together they did, in a great puzzle that provided me with years of speculation so enjoyable I didn't try very hard to find a solution.

Melville had written—and it stuck with me—that the sperm whale stays submerged for an hour or more "a thousand fathoms in the sea." He dives there to feed on giant squid. Melville deduced this from the fact that the whale "disgorges what are supposed to be the detached arms of the squid . . . these arms . . . exceeding twenty and thirty feet in length." He added that "the monster to which these arms belonged clings by them to the bed of the ocean."

The chemical element in my puzzle constituted a small part of Introduction to General Chemistry, which I took in my freshman year, and a large part of what I didn't dislike in the course: Boyle's Law, named after the seventeenth-century English natural philosopher Robert Boyle, an early promoter of experimentation who discovered that at any given temperature, the pressure times the volume of a gas is a constant. Increasing the pressure makes the volume decrease; decreasing the pressure makes the volume increase.

The connection to Moby Dick was probably injected into my unconscious by Melville's description of dead whales. Sometimes a whale will

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sink, Melville noted, but sometimes he will rise again, "more buoyant than in life. But the reason of this is obvious. Gases are generated in him; he swells to a prodigious magnitude; becomes a sort of animal baloon [*sic*]."

I pictured the whale as an enormous bag made of blubber and filled with air (after all, any creature that could spend an hour underwater must be mostly lung).

Now add Boyle's Law.

Melville specified the depth to which the sperm whale swims to satisfy his cravings: a thousand fathoms. There are six feet in a fathom. Six thousand feet. More than a mile! The pressure a mile below the surface is tremendous. It is easy to calculate. Melville calculated it. We can check his answer. Before we do, however, let's think about the situation qualitatively. Boyle's Law says: increase the pressure and the volume decreases. A whale of regulation size at the surface should, at the pressures a thousand fathoms down, decrease its volume to the size of a bathtub!

I was perfectly willing to concede that something had to be wrong with this. But what? Boyle's Law has been quite reliable for more than three centuries. Melville was a whaler, and his whaling information was also quite reliable. But, as we shall see, he, too, evidently worried about Boyle's Law.

After college, when I was a graduate student in physics, I took my problem to my peers. Physics students are trained to apply their physics to the world around them in order to explain how it works. I therefore presented several of them with the facts: the depth of the dive, the approximate size of the lungs required to supply an hour of air underwater, and Boyle's Law. Then I stated my result: a miniwhale. Each of my consultants would ponder a while, then slowly say something like, "Seems right." And yet, how could it be right? A whale diminishing with depth and expanding again on surfacing?

Aware that my physicist's approximation of a whale as a bag of air might be too simpleminded, I approached some biology students. Some of the biologists dismissed my query by saying they were not familiar with Boyle's Law. Those familiar with it were not familiar with what is standard for physics students, namely, approximating problems that defy solution by models that can be solved. These biology students said dryly, "A whale is not a volume of gas."

Let us now look at some of the details of the problem, along with Melville's thoughts on it.

Pressure is the force per unit area. A pressure with which we are all familiar is ordinary air pressure, sometimes called barometric pressure. That pressure comes from the weight of the earth's atmosphere. The

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atmosphere is only a few miles thick, which is why most people who climb Mount Everest (elevation 29,028 feet, or nearly six miles) need oxygen. The weight of a column of air as high as our atmosphere presses down with a force of 14.7 pounds on a square inch of surface. If, looking down on your head, we consider its effective area to be a circle (a physicist's approximation of you as a roundhead) with an area of roughly 37 square inches,[1] the weight on your head is more than 500 pounds.[2] That's quite a force! But you're used to it. (Just goes to show that you can get used to a lot.)

Let's get used to this concept in some other ways. The 14.7 pounds per square inch represents the weight of a column of air the height of our atmosphere—several miles. A column of water, considerably more dense than air, need be only about 34 feet high to have the same weight as those several miles of air. Mercury, still more dense, has to be only about 30 inches high—760 millimeters, the units we generally use to denote normal atmospheric pressure—to have the same weight as the 34 feet of water or the several miles of air. That 14.7 pounds per square inch or 760 millimeters of mercury is called "one atmosphere." Another way to grasp one atmosphere is to think about tires. On a bicycle or a car the tires are usually pressurized to about 32 pounds per square inch, roughly twice as much as in one atmosphere. Kick one of those tires. It's pretty hard. Doubling the pressure to two atmospheres means you've squeezed into your tires twice the volume of air you'd have at normal atmospheric pressure.

If we started with a balloon at the surface of the ocean, every 34 feet we take it down makes the pressure on it increase by one atmosphere. At 34 feet down, the pressure is two atmospheres; at 68 feet down, the pressure is three atmospheres; at 340 feet down, the pressure is eleven atmospheres. (Remember that the pressure at the surface is one atmosphere. Therefore, we have to add one atmosphere to the ten we get in going down 340 feet.) And if the pressure increases eleven times, that means the volume will decrease eleven times. So when Melville said the sperm whale went down 1,000 fathoms, that's about 180 atmospheres. And if we envision our whale as a balloon, his volume would become 1/180 of what it was at the surface, to make him the size of a bathtub—not even a Jacuzzi, but a little old claw-footed, cast-iron bathtub like your grandmother's.

As I've said, Melville, too, was troubled by the pressure on his whale. He wrote that

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[1]The area of a circle is π times the square of the radius, where $\pi = 3.14$. A size 7 hat fits a head with a diameter of 7 inches, radius 3.5 inches. The area is therefore 3.14 x 3.5 x 3.5, or approximately 37 square inches.

[2]14.7 pounds per square inch x 37 square inches, or almost 550 pounds.

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> owing to the enormous surface of him . . . the pressure of the water is immense. We all know what an astonishing weight we ourselves stand up under, even here, above ground, in the air; how vast, then, the burden of a whale, bearing on his back a column of 200 fathoms of ocean! It must be at least equal to the weight of 50 atmospheres! One whaleman has estimated it at the weight of twenty line-of-battle ships, with all their guns, and stores, and men on board.

Well, at 200 fathoms the pressure is actually 37 atmospheres, not 50, and the pressure of the water, the number of pounds on a square inch, is the same no matter how big or small the whale; the total weight of water, not the weight on a square inch or foot (pressure), is what goes up with an increase in surface area. But who'll quibble? Melville had the right worry. If I were giving him the exam, he'd get almost full credit, with only a few points off for numerical inaccuracy.

Now, if you are about to shrug and voice the biology students' objection that a whale is not a volume of gas—not an air-filled balloon—just pause a moment to learn what Melville said on the subject.

From a skeleton seventy-two feet long, Melville inferred that the whale must have been ninety feet long, the skeleton being one-fifth shorter than the body. The skull and jaw took up twenty feet, leaving fifty feet of plain backbone. Attached to the backbone, for something less than a third of its length, was "the mighty circular basket of ribs which once enclosed his vitals." When considering these ribs, Melville was struck by the fact that while the greatest "depth" of the whale must have been at least sixteen feet, "the corresponding rib measured but little more than eight feet." Melville also observed that "only in the extreme lower, backward sloping part of the front of the head is there the slightest vestige of bone; and not till you get near twenty feet from the forehead do you come to the full cranial development. So that the whole enormous mass is as one wad." One does not get the impression of great rigidity.

So even if my bag of gas is only one-third the volume of the whale, the part enclosed by the ribs, we've got a pretty big balloon there, enclosed by a blubbery blob—there's nothing like the steel case of a submarine to fend off the inexorable Law of Boyle. And, heeding Melville (who was ruminating at the time on the whale's spout), "Still, we can hypothesize, even if we cannot prove and establish."

I did no further investigation of the problem for years, being content to smile at my image of a miniwhale. Then, at a conference on biophysics, an area I worked in briefly, I met a researcher with a medical degree. Our talk meandered around to my whale problem. This researcher solved it—or at least I thought he did—by confidently informing me that whales have a special mechanism that enables them to increase the pressure inside their bodies in order to make it equal the pressure outside.

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With the pressure inside the same as that outside, there is no extra pressure on the whale's surface to make his volume of gas decrease.

This made sense to me. If you drink directly from a plastic soda bottle, with your mouth completely covering the top, you see what happens when you decrease the pressure inside a container relative to the pressure outside, in this case by swallowing the container's contents. The plastic bottle collapses. Even an aluminum can collapses—if you can manage to get your mouth completely over the hole, so the outside air can't get in. The whale in my vision didn't buckle because his blubber walls weren't rigid like a can's; they were elastic and could contract as the pressure outside became greater than the pressure inside. But here was this man with a medical degree saying the pressure outside wouldn't become greater than the pressure inside because the whale had a means for pumping himself up internally.

Alas, this explanation turned out to be too good to be true. I vaguely remembered that Melville had had some words on this very subject. A bit of hunting produced: ". . . ordinary fish possess what is called a swimming bladder in them, capable, at will, of distension or contraction, . . . the sperm whale, as far as I know, has no such provision in him."

This swimming bladder was undoubtedly what the medical researcher had meant by the special mechanism. But Melville said the sperm whale doesn't have one, which is reasonable, since a whale is not a fish—despite Melville's definition of the whale as a spouting fish with a horizontal tail. It was back to Boyle.

In time the pleasure I derived from my miniwhale diminished. It was time to know. I therefore read what I could, asked whom I would, and ultimately came up enlightened.

First, accepted facts.

Sperm whales do prey on giant squid. They do dive to great depths, deeper even than Moby Dick's thousand fathoms. (Other whales can also dive deep, but ordinarily they don't. The sperm whale's dive is dictated by his desire for squid, which he apparently obtains from the depths.) An average dive, however, is about a thousand feet, and an average dive's duration about ten minutes. The deep dives do take an hour. How does the whale accomplish this? Let's look at our Boyle's Law problem to start, then fill in the refinements.

Our whale takes a deep breath, then takes the plunge. As he goes down, the increasing pressure of the water causes his lungs to collapse (I was right!) and his viscera to press against his diaphragm, making it bulge into the space formerly occupied by air-filled lungs. At a depth of 100 meters (about 330 feet, which, as you will remember, means a pressure of eleven atmospheres), the lungs have collapsed completely. As the whale dives deeper, the further increase in pressure has no effect

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because the whale's body is essentially incompressible, like the water surrounding it.

So the whale does get smaller—by pretzeling into the space where his lungs used to be!

The whale—even though he doesn't become a miniwhale—has therefore satisfied Boyle's Law. The part of him that is gas does indeed get smaller, smaller even than a claw-footed bathtub; when the lungs collapse, it diminishes to zero. I had wrongly assumed that, in order to accommodate an hour without breathing, the whale is mostly lung. Even though, after reading Melville's description of the skeleton, I had reduced the lung size to a third of the whale, that was still too much. It turns out that although the whale's lungs are enormous, they are roughly the same size relative to his overall size as our lungs are relative to *our* overall size. The whale can stay underwater longer than we can, not because of the size of his lungs, but because he manages his resources more efficiently.

One opportunity for efficiency centers on how much fresh air is inhaled. When we breathe in, only 10 or 15 percent of our old stale air is exchanged for new; when a whale breathes in, 90 percent of his stale air can be exchanged. By the time a whale dives, he has taken many breaths at the surface and has all the oxygen his lungs can hold at the ready. Athletes attempt to achieve a similar condition by hyperventilating.

Lungs full of fresh air are a big help, but unless the whale had some other tricks as well, he could never stay underwater for an hour. Another opportunity for efficiency lies in the storage of oxygen in parts of the body other than the lungs. Hemoglobin is the protein that carries oxygen in the blood. Myoglobin, another protein with an affinity for oxygen, is found in muscle. Whales have concentrations of myoglobin in their muscles that approach ten times those of humans. Oxygen can be stored in the myoglobin until ready for use. The whale begins his dive, therefore, with a much greater supply of oxygen than a human would.

There are additional efficiencies. Whales are more tolerant than we are to the buildup of lactic acid and carbon dioxide in their blood. If there is not enough oxygen for the breakdown of glycogen to carbon dioxide in the series of processes that produce energy in muscle, the series can be stopped before its final stage, when lactic acid is produced. (When human athletes experience this "oxygen debt"—the lactic acid eventually has to be oxidized to carbon dioxide—they pant. The whale's panting is the spout that shoots out of his blowhole when he returns to the surface. "Thar she blows!" means that the whale is exhaling. The spout, once thought to consist of water, is now known to be primarily air, confirming the hypothesis to which Melville was referring when he said, "Still, we can hypothesize, even if we cannot prove and establish.") Whales may also be able to conserve oxygen during a dive, as seals do, by diverting oxygenated blood only to essential organs like the brain.

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The brain leads us to its container, the head. The British biologist W. Nigel Bonner states in his book *Whales:* "Without doubt, the most remarkable thing about the sperm whale is its all-but incredible head. In a large bull, the head can make up a quarter of the length of the whale and more than a third of its weight. The vast chariot-shaped skull supports what the old whalers called the junk and the case—both oil-rich tissues. . . . The case and the junk between them constitute the spermaceti organs . . . [which must have] a highly important function." After many years of arguing over what that function might be, anatomists have identified it relatively recently as regulating buoyancy, so the whale can adjust his position up or down without using energy to swim. (The evidence for this is the fact that the whale surfaces from his dive in the same spot he started from.)

Now hear what Melville had to say on the subject. This comes after his statement that the whale didn't, as far as he knew, possess a swimming bladder:

> Considering, too, the otherwise inexplicable manner in which he now depresses his head altogether beneath the surface, and anon swims with it high elevated out of the water; considering the unobstructed elasticity of its envelop [*sic*]; considering the unique interior of the head, it has hypothetically occurred to me, I say that those mystical lung-celled honeycombs there may possibly have some hitherto unknown and unsuspected connexion with the outer air, so as to be susceptible to atmospheric distension and contraction.

The present explanation involves the effects of temperature and pressure on the density of the spermaceti oil to control buoyancy. But, as usual, Melville had the right idea.

As far as my initial problem was concerned, that of Boyle's Law and the miniwhale, I was content. However, as happens often in science, the search for the solution to one problem led to the discovery of another problem. Deep-diving whales might not be compressed to the size of bathtubs, but what about decompression sickness? Human divers and workmen who build tunnels under waterways must carefully regulate the speed at which they return to the surface from below. Why don't whales worry about coming up too fast? Why don't they get the bends?

Here the solution is far simpler, though it took a long time to be appreciated by physiologists.

Scuba divers experience the same increase in pressure that whales do, but haven't evolved sufficiently to manage with collapsed lungs. In order to prevent their lungs from collapsing, divers breathe air from a tank—air regulated to be at a pressure just about equal to the pressure of the

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surrounding water, so the pressure inside the body will equal the pressure outside. This produces a potential problem. Because gases dissolve more readily under pressure, the nitrogen in air dissolves in the body's fluids, with the possibility that it will bubble out later, like the gas in a soda when the can is opened. If a bubble reaches a strategic spot, it can produce the pain and crippling that constitute the bends, or even, if it reaches a vital blood vessel, can kill the diver. The whale doesn't get the bends because he doesn't breathe pressurized air. He dives on a single breath. It's a big breath, but it's only one breath inhaled at atmospheric pressure. Unlike the human diver, the whale does not continue to breathe pressurized air that will dissolve in his fluids. (The small quantity of nitrogen from his surface breath does not present a problem.) Hence—o evolution!—Moby Dick could go down a thousand feet, dine on a squid, and come back up again at will.

"Give me a condor's quill!" wrote Melville. "Give me Vesuvius' crater for an inkstand! Friends, hold my arms! For in the mere act of penning my thoughts of this leviathan, they weary me, and make me faint with their outreaching comprehensiveness of sweep, as if to include the whole circle of the sciences . . ."

Or at least chemistry, physics, biology, and mathematics. With the help of Melville, Boyle, Bonner, and a few friends, I have learned to appreciate the outreaching comprehensiveness of the whale's sweep, as well as the literal and metaphoric truth of another passage from the book Melville wrote with a condor's quill: "From his mighty bulk the whale affords a most congenial theme whereon to enlarge, amplify and generally expatiate. Would you, you could not compress him."

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"Only Connect . . ."

The Goals of a Liberal Education

WILLIAM CRONON

What does it mean to be a liberally educated person? It seems such a simple question, especially given the frequency with which colleges and universities genuflect toward this well-worn phrase as the central icon of their institutional missions. Mantra-like, the words are endlessly repeated, starting in the glossy admissions brochures that high school students receive by the hundreds in their mailboxes and continuing right down to the last tired invocations they hear on commencement day. It would be surprising indeed if the phrase did not begin to sound at least a little empty after so much repetition, and surely undergraduates can be forgiven if they eventually regard liberal education as either a marketing ploy or a shibboleth. Yet many of us continue to place great stock in these words, believing them to describe one of the ultimate goods that a college or university should serve. So what exactly do we mean by liberal education, and why do we care so much about it?

In speaking of "liberal" education, we certainly do *not* mean an education that indoctrinates students in the values of political liberalism, at least not in the most obvious sense of the latter phrase. Rather, we use these words to describe an educational tradition that celebrates and nurtures human freedom. These days *liberal* and *liberty* have become words so mired in controversy, embraced and reviled as they have been by the far ends of the political spectrum, that we scarcely know how to

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use them without turning them into slogans—but they can hardly be separated from this educational tradition. *Liberal* derives from the Latin *liberalis,* meaning "of or relating to the liberal arts," which in turn derives from the Latin word *liber,* meaning "free." But the word actually has much deeper roots, being akin to the Old English word *lēodan,* meaning "to grow," and *lēod,* meaning "people." It is also related to the Greek word *eleutheros,* meaning "free," and goes all the way back to the Sanskrit word *rodhati,* meaning "one climbs," "one grows." *Freedom* and *growth:* here, surely, are values that lie at the very core of what we mean when we speak of a liberal education.

Liberal education is built on these values: it aspires to nurture the growth of human talent in the service of human freedom. So one very simple answer to my question is that liberally educated people have been liberated by their education to explore and fulfill the promise of their own highest talents. But what might an education for human freedom actually look like? There's the rub. Our current culture wars, our struggles over educational standards are all ultimately about the concrete embodiment of abstract values like "freedom" and "growth" in actual courses and textbooks and curricular requirements. Should students be forced to take courses in American history, and if so, what should those courses contain? Should they be forced to learn a foreign language, encounter a laboratory science, master calculus, study grammar at the expense of creative writing (or the reverse), read Plato or Shakespeare or Marx or Darwin? Should they be required to take courses that foster ethnic and racial tolerance? Even if we agree about the importance of freedom and growth, we can still disagree quite a lot about which curriculum will best promote these values. That is why, when we argue about education, we usually spend less time talking about core values than about formal standards: what are the subjects that all young people should take to help them become educated adults?

This is not an easy question. Maybe that is why—in the spirit of E. D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy* and a thousand college course catalogs—our answers to it often take the form of *lists:* lists of mandatory courses, lists of required readings, lists of essential facts, lists of the hundred best novels written in English in the twentieth century, and so on and on. This impulse toward list making has in fact been part of liberal education for a very long time. In their original medieval incarnation, the "liberal arts" were required courses, more or less, that every student was supposed to learn before attaining the status of a "free man." There was nothing vague about the *artis liberalis.* They were a very concrete list of seven subjects: the *trivium,* which consisted of grammar, logic, and rhetoric; and the *quadrivium,* which consisted of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. Together, these were the forms of knowledge worthy of a free

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man. We should remember the powerful class and gender biases that were built into this vision of freedom. The "free men" who studied the liberal arts were male aristocrats; these specialized bodies of knowledge were status markers that set them apart from "unfree" serfs and peasants, as well as from the members of other vulgar and ignoble classes. Our modern sense of liberal education has expanded from this medieval foundation to include a greater range of human talents and a much more inclusive number of human beings, holding out at least the dream that *everyone* might someday be liberated by an education that stands in the service of human freedom.

And yet when we try to figure out what this education for human freedom might look like, we still make lists. We no longer hold up as a required curriculum the seven *artis liberalis* of the medieval university; we no longer expect that the classical nineteenth-century college curriculum in Greek and Latin is enough to make a person learned. But we *do* offer plenty of other complicated lists with which we try to identify the courses and distribution requirements that constitute a liberal education. Such requirements vary somewhat from institution to institution, but certain elements crop up predictably. However complex the curricular tables and credit formulas may become—and they can get pretty baroque!—more often than not they include a certain number of total credit hours; a basic composition course; at least pre-calculus mathematics; some credits in a foreign language; some credits in the humanities; some credits in the social sciences; some credits in the natural sciences; and concentrated study in at least one major discipline.

We have obviously come a long way from the *artis liberalis*—and yet I worry that amid all these requirements we may be tempted to forget the ultimate purpose of this thing we call a liberal education. No matter how deliberately they may have been hammered out in committee meetings, it's not clear what these carefully articulated and finely tuned requirements have to do with *human freedom.*

And when we try to state the purpose of such requirements, we often flounder. Here, for instance, is what one institution I know well states as the "Objects of a Liberal Education": "(1) competency in communication; (2) competency in using the modes of thought characteristic of the major areas of knowledge; (3) a knowledge of our basic cultural heritage; (4) a thorough understanding of at least one subject area." This is the kind of language one expects from an academic committee, I guess, but it is hardly a statement that stirs the heart or inspires the soul.

One problem, I think, is that it is much easier to itemize the requirements of a curriculum than to describe the qualities of the human beings we would like that curriculum to produce. All the required courses in the world will fail to give us a liberal education if, in the act of requiring

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them, we forget that their purpose is to nurture human freedom and growth.

I would therefore like to return to my opening question and try to answer it (since I too find lists irresistible) with a list of my own. My list consists not of required courses but of personal qualities: the ten qualities I most admire in the people I know who seem to embody the values of a liberal education. How does one recognize liberally educated people?

1. *They listen and they hear.*

This is so simple that it may not seem worth saying, but in our distracted and over-busy age, I think it's worth declaring that educated people know how to pay attention—to others and to the world around them. They work hard to hear what other people say. They can follow an argument, track logical reasoning, detect illogic, hear the emotions that lie behind both the logic and the illogic, and ultimately empathize with the person who is feeling those emotions.

2. *They read and they understand.*

This too is ridiculously simple to say but very difficult to achieve, since there are so many ways of reading in our world. Educated people can appreciate not only the front page of the *New York Times* but also the arts section, the sports section, the business section, the science section, and the editorials. They can gain insight from not only THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR and the *New York Review of Books* but also from *Scientific American,* the *Economist,* the *National Enquirer, Vogue,* and *Reader's Digest.* They can enjoy John Milton and John Grisham. But skilled readers know how to read far more than just words. They are moved by what they see in a great art museum and what they hear in a concert hall. They recognize extraordinary athletic achievements; they are engaged by classic and contemporary works of theater and cinema; they find in television a valuable window on popular culture. When they wander through a forest or a wetland or a desert, they can identify the wildlife and interpret the lay of the land. They can glance at a farmer's field and tell the difference between soy beans and alfalfa. They recognize fine craftsmanship, whether by a cabinetmaker or an auto mechanic. And they can surf the World Wide Web. All of these are ways in which the eyes and the ears are attuned to the wonders that make up the human and the natural worlds. None of us can possibly master all these forms of "reading," but educated people should be competent in many of them and curious about all of them.

3. *They can talk with anyone.*

Educated people know how to talk. They can give a speech, ask

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thoughtful questions, and make people laugh. They can hold a conversation with a high school dropout or a Nobel laureate, a child or a nursing-home resident, a factory worker or a corporate president. Moreover, they participate in such conversations not because they like to talk about themselves but because they are genuinely interested in others. A friend of mine says one of the most important things his father ever told him was that whenever he had a conversation, his job was "to figure out what's so neat about what the other person does." I cannot imagine a more succinct description of this critically important quality.

4. *They can write clearly and persuasively and movingly.*

What goes for talking goes for writing as well: educated people know the craft of putting words on paper. I'm not talking about parsing a sentence or composing a paragraph, but about expressing what is in their minds and hearts so as to teach, persuade, and move the person who reads their words. I am talking about writing as a form of touching, akin to the touching that happens in an exhilarating conversation.

5. *They can solve a wide variety of puzzles and problems.*

The ability to solve puzzles requires many skills, including a basic comfort with numbers, a familiarity with computers, and the recognition that many problems that appear to turn on questions of quality can in fact be reinterpreted as subtle problems of quantity. These are the skills of the analyst, the manager, the engineer, the critic: the ability to look at a complicated reality, break it into pieces, and figure out how it works in order to do practical things in the real world. Part of the challenge in this, of course, is the ability to put reality back together again after having broken it into pieces—for only by so doing can we accomplish practical goals without violating the integrity of the world we are trying to change.

6. *They respect rigor not so much for its own sake but as a way of seeking truth.*

Truly educated people love learning, but they love wisdom more. They can appreciate a closely reasoned argument without being unduly impressed by mere logic. They understand that knowledge serves values, and they strive to put these two—knowledge and values—into constant dialogue with each other. The ability to recognize true rigor is one of the most important achievements in any education, but it is worthless, even dangerous, if it is not placed in the service of some larger vision that also renders it humane.

7. *They practice humility, tolerance, and self-criticism.*

This is another way of saying that they can understand the power of other people's dreams and nightmares as well as their own. They have the intellectual range and emotional generosity to step outside their own

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experiences and prejudices, thereby opening themselves to perspectives different from their own. From this commitment to tolerance flow all those aspects of a liberal education that oppose parochialism and celebrate the wider world: studying foreign languages, learning about the cultures of distant peoples, exploring the history of long-ago times, discovering the many ways in which men and women have known the sacred and given names to their gods. Without such encounters, we cannot learn how much people differ—and how much they have in common.

8. *They understand how to get things done in the world.*

In describing the goal of his Rhodes Scholarships, Cecil Rhodes spoke of trying to identify young people who would spend their lives engaged in what he called "the world's fight," by which he meant the struggle to leave the world a better place than they had found it. Learning how to get things done in the world in order to leave it a better place is surely one of the most practical and important lessons we can take from our education. It is fraught with peril because the power to act in the world can so easily be abused—but we fool ourselves if we think we can avoid acting, avoid exercising power, avoid joining the world's fight. And so we study power and struggle to use it wisely and well.

9. *They nurture and empower the people around them.*

Nothing is more important in tempering the exercise of power and shaping right action than the recognition that no one ever acts alone. Liberally educated people understand that they belong to a community whose prosperity and well-being are crucial to their own, and they help that community flourish by making the success of others possible. If we speak of education for freedom, then one of the crucial insights of a liberal education must be that the freedom of the individual is possible only in a free community, and vice versa. It is the community that empowers the free individual, just as it is free individuals who lead and empower the community. The fulfillment of high talent, the just exercise of power, the celebration of human diversity: nothing so redeems these things as the recognition that what seem like personal triumphs are in fact the achievements of our common humanity.

10. *They follow E. M. Forster's injunction from* Howard's End: *"Only connect . . ."*

More than anything else, being an educated person means being able to see connections that allow one to make sense of the world and act within it in creative ways. Every one of the qualities I have described here—listening, reading, talking, writing, puzzle solving, truth seeking, seeing through other people's eyes, leading, working in a community—is finally about connecting. A liberal education is about gaining the power and the wisdom, the generosity and the freedom to connect.

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I believe we should measure our educational system—whether we speak of grade schools or universities—by how well we succeed in training children and young adults to aspire to these ten qualities. I believe we should judge ourselves and our communities by how well we succeed in fostering and celebrating these qualities in each of us.

But I must offer two caveats. The first is that my original question—"What does it mean to be a liberally educated person?"—is misleading, deeply so, because it suggests that one can somehow take a group of courses, or accumulate a certain number of credits, or undergo an obligatory set of learning experiences, and emerge liberally educated at the end of the process. Nothing could be further from the truth. A liberal education is not something any of us ever *achieve;* it is not a *state.* Rather, it is a way of living in the face of our own ignorance, a way of groping toward wisdom in full recognition of our own folly, a way of educating ourselves without any illusion that our educations will ever be complete.

My second caveat has to do with individualism. It is no accident that an educational philosophy described as "liberal" is almost always articulated in terms of the individuals who are supposed to benefit from its teachings. I have similarly implied that the ten qualities on my list belong to individual people. I have asserted that liberal education in particular is about nurturing human freedom—helping young people discover and hone their talents—and this too sounds as if education exists for the benefit of individuals.

All this is fair enough, and yet it too is deeply misleading in one crucial way. Education for human freedom is also education for human community. The two cannot exist without each other. Each of the qualities I have described is a craft or a skill or a way of being in the world that frees us to act with greater knowledge or power. But each of these qualities also makes us ever more aware of the connections we have with other people and the rest of creation, and so they remind us of the obligations we have to use our knowledge and power responsibly. If I am right that all these qualities are finally about connecting, then we need to confront one further paradox about liberal education. In the act of making us free, it also binds us to the communities that gave us our freedom in the first place; it makes us responsible to those communities in ways that limit our freedom. In the end, it turns out that liberty is not about thinking or saying or doing whatever we want. It is about exercising our freedom in such a way as to make a difference in the world and make a difference for more than just ourselves.

And so I keep returning to those two words of E. M. Forster's: "Only connect." I have said that they are as good an answer as any I know to the question of what it means to be a liberally educated person; but they are also an equally fine description of that most powerful and generous form

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of human connection we call *love*. I do not mean romantic or passionate love, but the love that lies at the heart of all the great religious faiths: not eros, but agape. Liberal education nurtures human freedom in the service of human community, which is to say that in the end it celebrates love. Whether we speak of our schools or our universities or ourselves, I hope we will hold fast to this as our constant practice, in the full depth and richness of its many meanings: *Only connect.*

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Fiction at *The New Yorker*

FRANCES KIERNAN

Last July, when it was announced that David Remnick would succeed Tina Brown as editor of *The New Yorker*, my first thought was, "What will he do about fiction?" While my interest might seem unduly proprietary, it was not without some foundation. After all, I had worked in the magazine's Fiction Department for two-thirds of my adult life.

I first walked into *The New Yorker*'s offices in September of 1966, as an English major just graduated from Barnard, at the end of what I think could fairly be called the magazine's Golden Age. Within recent memory it had published Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, and what would turn out to be the last of J. D. Salinger's stories about the Glass family. Although it had taken strong stands against pesticides, de facto segregation, and the escalating war in Vietnam, most of its readers and advertisers hadn't seemed to notice. Indeed, in "Tiny Mummies" and "Lost in the Whichy Thicket," a wickedly irreverent two-part article published the previous fall in the New York *Herald Tribune*, Tom Wolfe had taken the magazine to task for being stodgy and complacent.

I arrived blissfully unaware of all this. In college, when I had a free moment, I had liked to look at the ads and the cartoons. Once in a while I had stumbled upon an article or story that caught my interest. I can recall a long review of the letters of Oscar Wilde by W. H. Auden (who could have been the man in the moon for all I knew) and a terribly sad story about a young woman washing her hair alone, on Sunday, while her married lover spends the day with his young son (which I now realize was excerpted from Mary McCarthy's *The Group*).

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By the time the Barnard placement office sent me to 25 West Forty-third Street, I could tell you who W. H. Auden and Mary McCarthy were, but, like most of the magazine's readers, I had a totally unrealistic idea of what *The New Yorker* was like. I remember expecting to be greeted by lots of glass and chrome and thick red carpeting. I was applying for a job as the twentieth-floor receptionist, and I approached the interview with no little trepidation. I had long ago taught myself to touch-type, but I was a nervous typist, particularly when there was someone standing over me with a stopwatch. On a manual I was sometimes passable, but on an electric, once my hands began to shake I was all over the place.

The first thing I noticed when I got off at the twentieth floor for my interview with Harriet Walden, the head of the typing pool, was the gray linoleum floors. In fact, there was gray everywhere I looked: on the floors, on the reception room walls, on the walls of the long dingy corridor I was told to follow, on the doors of the narrow shoe-box offices that lined that corridor. The *New Yorker* offices looked exactly like the Barnard English department. Already I began to feel better. But what clinched it for me was the typing test. There was no stopwatch and no one looking over my shoulder. All that was asked was that I be reasonably accurate.

That fall I fell in love with *The New Yorker*. I loved it for looking like school, only shabbier. I loved it for acting as if it was better to get things right than to get them done fast. I loved it because when one of the office doors was left open, I could see a writer hunched over his or her typewriter or simply staring off into space, and because some of those writers would come out and visit with me when they needed a break. I loved it because the typing pool was called "Walden's Pond."

And I loved it because it seemed to take fiction as seriously as I did. When I arrived there, the magazine frequently ran three pieces of fiction a week. Two ran at the very front of the magazine, immediately after "Talk of the Town," and one ran in the back, just before the movie and theater reviews. To be up front was desirable for a couple of reasons: fiction was the first thing readers saw when they started leafing through the magazine, and it was easy to find. The latter was no small consideration in the days when there was no table of contents.

The reason the magazine could afford to run three stories a week was that it was so fat. In the months before Christmas, when ads seemed to multiply geometrically, the issues would swell to more than 240 pages. *The New Yorker* was able to carry this extra bulk because it was not only fatter than it is now but also half an inch taller and half an inch wider: a bigger magazine altogether.

Although my new job could hardly be called demanding, it was never boring. As the official twentieth-floor gatekeeper, I sat at a desk immediately to the right of the vestibule's bank of four elevators. From

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this desk, set in a small, self-contained compartment the size of a walk-in closet, I kept track of the comings and goings of the staff. I also screened visitors. In those astonishingly innocent days, there was no bulletproof glass protecting the reception desk, no buzzer releasing a lock on the door to the magazine's offices.

At the beginning, the hardest part of my job was connecting the names on a printed personnel list to the faces of the twentieth floor's inhabitants. When I was not taking phone calls or scribbling messages or monitoring the flow of office traffic, I was free to pick up a book. That fall I read Saul Bellow's *Herzog* and Edith Wharton's *Age of Innocence,* both of which elicited heated comments from a good portion of the writers, editors, cartoonists, and visitors who passed my desk. Among those visitors were Eudora Welty, Woody Allen, J. D. Salinger, and John Updike, who engaged me in a lively debate on the relative aesthetic merits of the two hanging globes responsible for such lighting as the vestibule possessed.

Once in a while, Estee Stoll, a Barnard friend who was sent to the magazine by the placement office shortly after I was, would join me for a lunch at Schrafft's on Forty-sixth Street and Fifth Avenue. The rest of the secretaries on the floor I hardly knew. To my eye, all of them looked better dressed and better educated and altogether more confident than I. It was Estee's belief that we had all been chosen for our looks—a thought that did not trouble us unduly, just as it did not trouble us or any of our compatriots that we were automatically referred to as "girls."

It was obvious that this reception job had no future, but the way I saw it, I was going to be married the following June, and in a couple of years I wouldn't be working anyway. In the meantime, I enjoyed hour-long lunches, which left just enough time to browse among the paperbacks at Brentano's or make another trip to Lord and Taylor's. My old skirts and sweaters smacked too much of college. Pants had yet to be considered acceptable office attire, and everyone I admired seemed to be wearing a pastel-colored wool dress that came just above the knee. Looking back at the typing pool with more than a little nostalgia, I see a cluster of pretty long-stemmed flowers: perhaps a dozen young women with perfectly straight, shoulder-length hair and the palest of pale lips, trying, with varying success, to look like Julie Christie or Catherine Deneuve.

That November, two months after I started at *The New Yorker,* I was moved to the Fiction Department to work as a secretary for William Maxwell and Roger Angell. I was replacing a married secretary who was leaving exactly the way I planned to leave one day. William Maxwell was the author of a short story collection and several highly regarded novels. (When I went to buy a copy of *The Folded Leaf,* the sales clerk at Brentano's told me it was his favorite book of all time.) Roger Angell had

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written several short stories and was now writing humor pieces, but he was beginning to become famous for his baseball writing. In his mid-forties, he looked much the way he looks today. William Maxwell seemed to me to be very old, although in fact he was in his mid-fifties, the same age I am now. Working for these two editors, I didn't see as many famous writers as I had at the reception desk, but I had more than enough to keep me entertained.

My new office was at the end of that long gray corridor. It served as an anteroom to the large, white, almost perfectly square office where William Maxwell worked three days a week. My typewriter was a cumbersome black manual, my desk was enormous, and my single window faced north, toward the RCA Building. The desk was scratched and scarred. There was one straight-backed chair for visitors. A thick sheet of Plexiglas covered the worn carpeting, presumably protecting it from any further ravages by the three wheels of a swivel desk chair that seemed to date from the magazine's founding in 1925.

William Maxwell typed his own letters, and, thanks to the invention of the Xerox machine, I rarely had to make typed copies of manuscripts. For the most part, my work for William Maxwell consisted of Xeroxing the occasional letter, packing up all rejected manuscripts, answering the phone when his line was busy, and, at around two in the afternoon, serving him a cup of English Breakfast Tea and two shortbread biscuits. If he had a visitor, I brought out an extra cup and saucer and a whole pile of biscuits. The tea was made from a Twinings tea bag, and the water was boiled in an electric kettle on the shelf above my desk.

For Roger Angell, who had an office down by the typing pool, I also sent back rejected manuscripts, accompanied by letters I took down in longhand in his office and then typed up to the best of my ability. Taking dictation in this haphazard fashion was the closest I ever came to being a real secretary. In the process, I began picking up a set of stock phrases I would fall back on when it came time to compose my own letters. And for better or worse, without thinking twice about it, I began absorbing the taboos and prejudices that informed every judgment passed by *The New Yorker*'s Fiction Department.

My most arduous task was returning half of the rejected unsolicited manuscripts. (My half of the alphabet stretched from A through K. I didn't make the decisions on the A–K manuscripts, just shipped them home to the writers.) Back then, the Fiction Department had six editors, three secretaries, and two full-time readers. The readers' job was to comb through the unsolicited manuscripts, which tended to pour in with daunting frequency, sometimes at the rate of more than a hundred a week. The unsolicited manuscripts were treated with great seriousness. Promising stories were passed on by the readers to editors they believed would be sympathetic. Garrison Keillor came to *The New Yorker* that way,

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as did Ann Beattie, although for Beattie it would take more than a dozen additional submissions before a story was actually purchased.

In the unsolicited pile you could find young writers just starting out, as well as older writers who did not have an agent or the name of an editor. (A story by William Saroyan found its way to the magazine in this fashion.) In those days there were almost no writing programs; editors' names were not common knowledge (then, as now, *The New Yorker* did not publish a masthead); and agents were something of a rarity. Every year, two or three unsolicited stories were purchased. And every week a disproportionate amount of energy was expended on finding them.

The department had an enormous bank of fiction—with anywhere from fifty to one hundred stories, as I recall. (Roger Angell remembers it as closer to fifty; William Maxwell thinks it may have been seventy-five.) This meant that writers sometimes had to wait a year or more for their stories to run, but it also meant that the editors could be particular about the stories they bought. No less important, it meant that they could be selective about the stories they chose to run in any particular issue. By custom, the first piece of fiction was light or humorous, but because humor was hard to come by, they sometimes had to put two stories together. The third piece, which ran in back, was usually but not always reminiscence. At *The New Yorker,* memoirs had always been handled as fiction. In retrospect, such a designation seems puzzling or arbitrary, but at the time no one thought twice about it—just as no one thought twice about checking all short stories for factual accuracy as well as for consistency. That was simply the way things were done.

Having a large reserve of fiction on hand made it relatively easy to sustain the long-standing *New Yorker* tradition of publishing stories in their proper seasons—not merely running a Christmas story in the latter half of December but running a story that mentioned a ginger jar of daffodils in early spring. Sometimes, when a story had to be rushed into print because it was going to come out in a book (in which case the magazine insisted on a lag time of at least three months), the daffodils had to be changed to roses or dahlias or whatever was appropriate. But that was about as serious a fiction emergency as we were likely to get.

It seemed to me that there could be no better place in the whole world than the *New Yorker* Fiction Department. During my first two months there, the magazine ran stories by Vladimir Nabokov, Elizabeth Spencer, Larry Woiwode, Edith Templeton, John Updike, Maeve Brennan, S. J. Perelman, Woody Allen, and Frank Conroy, to name just a few. (Frank Conroy's story of a young runaway was actually a large chunk taken from *Stop-Time.* It ran in the company of a humor piece by S. J. Perelman and a piece of reminiscence by Emily Hahn about visiting a friend in the Congo who had gone native and taken three wives.) The Fiction Department editors got the pick of the finest stories available and

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the chance to help the writers make those stories even better. They worked hard on occasion, but they also had a good time. No one shouted and no one threw his weight around. Everyone was treated as an equal, and if some were more equal than others, that seemed fine.

There was no such thing as a meeting. The department was spread out over the twentieth floor, with the bulk of the editors almost a city block south of William Maxwell and Roger Angell. You would have been hard pressed to find more than three editors in one room together. Never did I see all six. Most communication was done on paper. When an editor wished to buy a story, this was done by means of something called an opinion sheet: a page of typing paper attached to a manuscript and folded in half to keep it safe from prying eyes as it made its way from one office to another. If the story was by John Updike, for instance, William Maxwell would send it on to Robert Henderson, who served as the department's clearinghouse, writing something like "I think we should take it"; Mr. Henderson would add "I agree"; and Mr. Shawn would sign off by saying "Yes, for an A." In other words, "Yes, let's run it as the principal piece, up front." (Humor pieces were B's and reminiscences were generally C's. Two B's were not supposed to run together, but, if pressed, you could have two A's. Occasionally a C would be made to substitute for a B or vice versa.)

Mr. Shawn was a remote presence to me—a small man with startlingly blue eyes who, on the rare occasions he stopped by to see William Maxwell, took care always to address me as Miss Landau. I know now that Mr. Shawn cared very much about fiction. He was no rubber stamp. It was he who had encouraged his editors to publish Donald Barthelme, whose stories had been appearing in the magazine for three years when I arrived.

There were four editors—William Maxwell, Roger Angell, Rachel MacKenzie, and Robert Henderson—who almost always had their way when they wished to buy a story and who, among them, bought most of the stories in the magazine. Since their tastes overlapped but did not exactly coincide, this made for variety in the fiction. Because there was space for three stories a week and more than enough money to buy extra stories, everyone was inclined to be generous.

When times are good, it is easy to behave well. Though the magazine was rich, salaries were low—but no one was complaining, owing in part to an annual cost-of-living adjustment and in part to the fact that many on the staff had other sources of income. Certainly the fiction writers were not complaining. They were being paid at a very generous word rate. This word rate was even more generous for those fortunate writers who, just before Christmas every year, received a "first-reading agreement." In exchange for consenting to give the magazine a first look at their fiction, they were all guaranteed a higher fee. If they went on to sell

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four stories within a given year, they also received a substantial "quantity bonus."

The only time I heard complaints was outside the office—usually at a cocktail party, where some complete stranger, having learned that I worked at *The New Yorker,* would come over and begin to attack the fiction. In those days, when people wanted to criticize the magazine, it was usually the fiction they went after. This was partly because *New Yorker* writers like Updike, O'Hara, and Cheever were highly visible, and partly because it had become fashionable in certain circles to complain about the sameness of the fiction. It was too suburban, these self-appointed critics argued, too inclined to dwell on upper-middle-class mores and manners. (It made no difference that O'Hara was on the outs with the magazine and Cheever was barely writing for it.) In fact, they didn't mind telling me that they themselves hadn't read the fiction in years.

I left *The New Yorker* in October of 1967—not to get married (I now saw no reason to quit a job I loved), but to join my new husband in California, where he was serving as a Navy doctor attached to the Marine Corps. By the time I returned to my old desk in the Fiction Department in the fall of 1969, the magazine had acquired a table of contents and lost something like forty pages—and you could no longer count on three stories a week. The magazine's stance on the Vietnam War had something to do with this, I believe. More pages were needed for reporting. At the same time, subscribers and advertisers were finally waking up to *The New Yorker*'s political views, and not always greeting them with open arms.

As it turned out, my job did have a future, in part because of the women's movement, but mostly because in an effort to recover lost advertising and to make the magazine more appealing to younger readers, the business department had decreed that all editors over sixty-five would have to retire in January of 1976. Secretaries at the magazine never went on to become editors, although on occasion they ended up marrying editors. Seeing the writing on the wall, virtually all the secretaries I had started out with had left to take editorial positions elsewhere. If I seemed to be more patient than they were, it was owing to my secret plan to teach English literature at Barnard some day. Since my return from California, I had been going to graduate school two nights a week.

During the winter of 1972, I was forced to conclude that I had no future in academia. Not knowing what to do next, I had cut back to one course a semester, when suddenly I became aware of all the baskets of unsolicited manuscripts piling up, threatening to take over my office. Several months earlier, the reader responsible for my half of the alphabet had left. The other reader, already hard pressed, was finding it impossible to take up the slack. Finally, one afternoon, I got up my courage, walked into William Maxwell's office, and asked if I could help read. As it

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turned out, I had a knack for finding publishable fiction. Unfortunately, Mr. Shawn did not want to hire another fiction reader. In the end, he startled both those who felt I should be promoted and those who argued against it by offering to make me a provisional editor. What this meant was that I would be trained to become a full-fledged editor while I earned my keep by reading half the unsolicited fiction and all the unsolicited "fact." That I had no interest whatsoever in nonfiction seemed to trouble no one. Indeed, more than one person suggested that it was an asset.

The good news was that I no longer had to tell people I was a secretary. The bad news was that I had to leave my old office and move halfway down the hall, across from the typing pool. The previous occupant of this office had been Janet Flanner, and I liked to believe that the pretty Facit typewriter on which I wrote my opinions and letters had once been hers. The occupant before Janet Flanner had been Hawley Truax, the retired chairman of *The New Yorker*'s board of directors, and I also liked to believe that the gray Mosler safe he had left behind, which I draped with an Indian bedspread in hopes of making it appear less cumbersome, contained a fortune in stock certificates and bonds.

My training as a fiction editor amounted to little more than an old-fashioned apprenticeship. Any story I found in the unsolicited pile I edited with the guidance of the editor who had supported its purchase. I alone dealt with the writer of the story, trying in my letters to sound knowledgeable and confident, all the while dreading the day the writer would show up in my office and discover just how young I was. The trouble was that publishable unsolicited stories did not come along very often. In the meantime, I practiced on photocopies of stories purchased by William Maxwell, Roger Angell, and, above all, by Rachel MacKenzie. Sitting side by side at a table with Rachel, my edited Xerox of the newly purchased story laid out alongside hers, I would compare and discuss the changes the two of us had made, page by page and line by line. For the three editors who set out to train me, the process was enormously time-consuming. Each story was different, and each was an education. From Roger Angell I learned to edit for clarity. From Rachel MacKenzie I learned to respect a writer's excesses and foibles. And from William Maxwell I learned that the best editors know when to put their pencils down.

Haphazard as it might seem, this makeshift apprenticeship was deemed sufficiently effective to be used in the training of two other young staff members. Daniel Menaker, who had started at the magazine as a fact checker, and Charles (Chip) McGrath, who had started at the copy desk, each spent three months in William Maxwell's office, at a large desk facing his, observing at firsthand how he went about the business of editing.

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On January 1, 1976, when the business department's decree took effect, Roger Angell went from being one of the youngest editors in the Fiction Department to the most senior, and Dan, Chip, and I went on to replace Robert Henderson and William Maxwell, who were forced to retire, and to fill in for Rachel MacKenzie, who was increasingly ill. By then the bank of fiction was down to twenty or thirty stories. Sometimes it would go as low as twelve or fifteen. The balance of the department would change as new editors came—first Veronica Geng, then Linda Asher and Gwyneth Cravens, and, finally, Alice Quinn. Later on there would be Pat Strachan. The department, I might add, worked best when there were at least three articulate and opinionated editors.

As the years passed, the list of writers we published also underwent a change—sometimes owing to death or illness and sometimes simply because the writers drifted away. The opinion sheets got more contentious as well as longer, sometimes stretching to three pages. So far as I could see, there was no such a thing as a *New Yorker* story. How could there be when you had writers as different as Edna O'Brien and Donald Barthelme, Garrison Keillor and Stanislaw Lem, Bobbie Ann Mason and Max Frisch, Jamaica Kincaid and William Trevor, Deborah Eisenberg and John Updike, Cynthia Ozick and David Plante?

I left *The New Yorker* at the end of 1987, the same year Bob Gottlieb replaced William Shawn as editor. I left for many reasons. But first and foremost I left because I didn't want to be the sort of person who goes around saying, "But that's not the way we used to do things around here." (Of course, now I'm saying just that, but at least I've spared myself and my colleagues a decade of fruitless tut-tutting.) For a long time after I left, I rarely looked at the fiction, although I continued to receive the magazine. I was busy first with a new job in publishing and then with trying to research and write a book. When I did look, the writers were sometimes the same ones I remembered and sometimes totally unfamiliar. But that was to be expected.

After Tina Brown took over in 1992 and moved the fiction to the back of the magazine, reducing it to one story per week, I looked at the stories even less frequently. When I looked at the table of contents, there were still familiar names, but of course a lot of the old editors were still there. With the arrival of Bill Buford, the former editor of *Granta*, and the departures of Daniel Menaker, Mary D. Kierstead, and Linda Asher, the Fiction Department changed. It still had Alice Quinn and Roger Angell, but they were often busy with other work for the magazine. There was a young editor, Cressida Leyshon; there were Columbia graduate students reading the unsolicited manuscripts. Above all, Bill Buford, the new head of the department, had final say on almost all the fiction purchased.

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Last fall, when I agreed to join a panel on *New Yorker* fiction at the Mercantile Library, I began to think more seriously about the subject than I had in years. Lately it had seemed to me that what I was seeing in the table of contents was pretty much the reflection of one man's taste. What this taste ran to was something I liked to call "guy stories." But rather than risk sounding like those pests who used to buttonhole me at cocktail parties, I decided, in honor of the occasion, to sit down and read the stories that had been published in September and October of 1997 in order to determine if my assumptions had any basis in fact.

What I found when I took a look at those eight issues of *The New Yorker* were eight stories about men, seven of them written by men. I found the sort of explicit sex Mr. Shawn would never have tolerated. I found a fascination with the connection between food and sex. I found almost every male narrator or protagonist to be either highly flawed or terribly unattractive. I found stories by established writers like William Trevor, Annie Proulx, Don DeLillo, Julian Barnes, and Steven Millhauser. And I found stories by young writers just starting out. I found much of the writing to be rougher than the writing we used to publish, but that too was to be expected. Writing, like many things, tends to be rougher these days.

In the course of my reading, I discovered one terrific story and three very good ones. But I saw none of the variety—and variety is the key word here—of September and October of 1966, when I was first at *The New Yorker.* Where was Alice Munro? Or Mavis Gallant? Or Alice Adams? Or Edna O'Brien? Or Shirley Hazzard? Where were Alice Mattison and Deborah Eisenberg and Julie Hecht? My guess was that there was no room for them. And my guess was that they would turn up eventually, here and there, in the coming months. But if you believe that fiction at its best can enrich or even change our lives, mustn't you constantly bear in mind that women have lives too?

A friend of mine likes to say that in order for a magazine to work, it needs at least a hundred pages. These days, even as it swells for Christmas, *The New Yorker* sometimes comes precariously close to missing its quota. Last summer it hovered around eighty pages. To make up the difference, the magazine runs special double issues, but few of those approach the fat issues of 1966—and when they do, they don't always carry many stories. Indeed, even the two double issues that are ostensibly devoted to fiction have been dominated by supporting material in the form of letters and snatches of literary history.

Last fall it looked to me as if fiction at *The New Yorker* was destined to remain a second-class citizen—something to be pushed aside when necessary or to be illustrated and explicated and never trusted to stand alone. It also looked as if women were being unfairly neglected. Last winter, after the magazine hired Deborah Treisman as deputy fiction

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editor, stories by women began to appear with greater frequency. For that I was immediately grateful. Unfortunately, because space was so scarce, the one piece of fiction that ran each week was often quite short.

Now that David Remnick has taken over as *The New Yorker*'s new editor, it seems as good a time as any to reconsider the myths and assumptions that have helped relegate fiction to the back of the magazine. I am not asking that he turn back the clock. I am simply asking that he do everything possible to give fiction a chance to make a case for itself.

The way I see it, in the best of all possible worlds, Si Newhouse would swallow the loss in revenue and give the magazine twenty additional pages on a regular basis. Then David Remnick would throw out Tina Brown's crossword puzzle and contributors' page, cut back on the listings in "Goings On," and give the Fiction Department space to run two stories per week. I know this is a lot to ask. And I know it flies in the face of all that passes for sound editorial wisdom. But I can't help hoping that life, like good fiction, will surprise me.

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Apartment House at Evening

GREGORY DJANIKIAN

Something about a hundred windows
lit up like a ship's upper decks, something

about the weed trees
tossing like water below

and the cumulus steam
from the boiler stacks billowing away

and something, too, about a woman
taking off her heels and leaning

dreamily on the balcony railing
as if there's an ocean about her

and something about the laundry
strung up between apartments

like flags signalling the future
and about the samba

wafting in the cool breeze
and moonlight falling from everywhere

and Nevrig dancing on the rooftop with Aram
and the city blazing with lights

like a harbor about to be left behind
with its customshouse and identity cards,

the lines untied now, the deep
horizonless night coming on.

Gregory Djanikian directs the creative writing program at the University of Pennsylvania. His most recent book of poetry is *About Distance*, published by Carnegie Mellon University Press.

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Suicide on My Mind, *Britannica* on My Table

EDWIN SHNEIDMAN

I think it is safe to say that ours is the only dining room in West Los Angeles on whose table—an eight-foot-long, two-hundred-pound behemoth on which I have taken my meals for many years—rest piles of photocopies of articles on suicide, all of which were printed in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* over the past 220 years. They represent the convergence of two crucially important strands in my own life. Indeed, as I look at the articles, arrayed before me in fanlike tiers, I get the odd feeling that the old oak table on which I have eaten so many thousands of dinners has been set not with its customary china and silver but with my intellectual autobiography.

My special relationship with the *Britannica* is of long standing. It is relevant to report that I was a sickly child and stayed home from school a great deal. The reader can readily imagine the sort of boy I was: frail, bookish, and undersized (I was small to begin with, and continued to shrink, comparatively speaking, as I was double-promoted four times in elementary school—entirely my mother's doing). Our house, fifteen miles and seventy years from the one in which my wife and I live today, resembled those of many Eastern European Jewish immigrant families with intellectual aspirations. There were copies of Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Conrad, and Mann, diligently assembled from the local Lincoln Heights Library's list of "The 100 Best." There was a windup Victrola and records of operatic arias sung by Caruso and Farrar. And in the

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center of all this—the jewel in the Shneidman family's cultural crown—there was the Ninth Edition of the *Britannica,* enshrined in a Stickley bookcase with glass doors and its own little key. The suite of Craftsman furniture to which the bookcase belonged also included a sofa, a chair, and a table. All of them are in my home today.

Among the happiest hours of my childhood were those spent alone at home, circa 1925. My parents would be working in their clothing store, my brother and sister would be in school, and I would be in my parents' pleasant bedroom, tucked in their 1910 Grand Rapids mahogany bed between two billowy white sheets, listening to Farrar sing Gilda and reading the encyclopedia. I have little doubt that more than half of what I know today I learned from the pages of the Ninth Edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica.* I suspect that this accounts for my essentially nineteenth-century ideas about science. And I muse that my frenetic and nervous way of studying (or reading or writing)—a lifelong habit—could well be a happy remnant of the fact that my first earnest perusals of "The Geometry" or "Kant" were interrupted every few minutes by the need to leap out of my parents' bed either to change the 78-rpm record or to wind the Victrola. It seems unlikely that I would so deeply love the intellectual life today had I not initially found my young mind's independence within such a cozy and easeful setting.

Fast-forward to 1949, the year that, quite by accident, I met my life's second great strand. I was thirty-one, working as a clinical psychologist at the Brentwood Veterans Administration hospital. On that particular morning I was in the subbasement of the old Los Angeles Hall of Records, in the coroner's vault, looking at file folders containing the records of certified deaths. The director of my hospital had asked me to prepare letters to two young widows whose husbands had recently committed suicide while they were hospital patients. My intention was to look at the two men's folders, make some notes, and get back to work.

The first folder contained something I had not seen before: a genuine suicide note. The second folder did not. Who could stop at this point? I looked at several dozen folders. It seemed that every so often I would open a folder—about one out of every fifteen suicide folders—and find a suicide note. I did a quick count of the folders on one shelf and estimated that I was standing in a room that contained approximately two thousand suicide notes. I felt like a cowpoke who, wandering home drunk on a dark night, stumbles into a pool of oil and is just sober enough to realize he has found his fortune.

Had I indulged my initial urge to read the letters right there in the coroner's vault, I might have learned a good deal about individual human tragedy, but I would have done nothing to advance the study of suicide, which was then an almost nonexistent field. Instead, in a deci-

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sion that changed my life, I made photocopies of more than seven hundred genuine suicide notes and put them aside *without* reading them, so that my colleague Norman Farberow and I could later compare them, in blind controlled studies, with simulated suicide notes that would be elicited from nonsuicidal people. The result was the first work on suicide notes—and indirectly on suicide itself—that followed scientific protocols. My subsequent career—helping to found the Los Angeles Suicide Prevention Center, developing a program in suicide prevention for the National Institute of Mental Health, thinking about suicide, writing about suicide—all dates from that morning in the subbasement of the Hall of Records. Since that day, I have been continuously intrigued by the topic of suicide and drawn to people who are on the brink of self-destruction. I am not a suicidal person myself; my fascination is, I suppose, partly voyeuristic and partly scientific. I have always been attracted to excitement, and few things could be more exciting than the pursuit of understanding in a virgin field that involved such strong and intimate human emotions.

The reader can surmise what it meant to me, a quarter century after I happened upon those suicide notes, to be invited to contribute my own seven pages of printed text, headed "Suicide," to volume 21 of the 1973 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* the same set of books that once was my Testament, Koran, and Upanishads.

I have come close to implying that the Ninth Edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* was a kind of father figure to me. It is true that I treated those books and the information in them with a respect bordering on awe, that they were authoritative, that they spoke to me ex cathedra. At that time, all these sentiments were also true of my unquestioned attitudes toward my father. Writing my own article for the *EB* was a psychological landmark; it gave me a voice of my own. I suddenly felt like Ernest Pontifex, in *The Way of All Flesh,* who was finally able to contravene his father without feeling that he was either destroying or betraying him.

Before I wrote my 1973 article, I looked at two or three earlier pieces. It did not occur to me then to view them as documents of intellectual history; I merely wished to identify my predecessors' pitfalls—such as an overreliance on dreary tables of statistics—so I could avoid stepping into them myself. I wrote the article and proudly added the Fourteenth Edition of the *Britannica* to the Ninth Edition that still reposed in the glass-fronted Stickley bookcase that I had inherited. Two and a half decades passed. Then, as I approached the age of eighty, I had another thought. It was, perhaps, the sort of retrospective notion one is unlikely to have in one's twenties or even fifties, when the habit of looking back is not so fully developed. Why not examine the articles on suicide in *all* the editions since the first one, in 1768?

The idea allowed me simultaneously to become, all over again, the

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unformed child in a soft bed who had learned about the world from his parents' encyclopedia, and also to read these articles on suicide—including my own—and see, from the emancipated vantage point of old age, their flaws, their anachronisms, their generational gaps of knowledge. If the *Britannica* was the most authoritative popular repository of knowledge during the various eras of its existence, would not its successive treatments of suicide reflect, in a long chronological march, our culture's changing attitudes toward the subject that had consumed my life? With the help of the Chicago staff of the *EB,* the New York Public Library, and Harvard's Houghton Library, I assembled copies of the encyclopedia's fourteen different articles on suicide. Together, they told a story—the attempt, over time, to answer such crucial questions as: Is suicide a sin? Is it a crime? Is it the responsibility of the individual or of society? What causes it? Can human suffering be reduced to statistics? How can suicide be prevented? *Should* it be prevented? And that story is what is now spread out, with my wife's indulgence, all over our dining table.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* while not the first encyclopedia—its forerunners include the remarkable *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers* of Diderot and d'Alembert, published in France starting in 1751—has remained the most constant and influential. Its first edition was published in Edinburgh in 1768. There have been fourteen editions since then, of which the Eleventh Edition, of 1910, is generally considered the greatest. Roughly speaking, a new edition was published every ten or twenty years (in the interim there were sometimes several printings with minor variations) until the Fourteenth Edition, in 1929. Thereafter, for over a half century, there were only relatively modest alterations: some articles were dropped, some added, some contributors replaced. With the Fifteenth Edition, in 1974, there was a radical restructuring of the overall format of the *EB:* the time-honored, strictly alphabetical arrangement was dropped in favor of a thesaurus-like approach, including a one-volume Propaedia (an overview), a Micropaedia (a comprehensive survey), and a Macropaedia (topics discussed in detail). The latest version of the *Britannica,* "published" in 1994, is on CD-ROM—a hundred pounds of books reduced to about an ounce.

There was no article on suicide in the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica.* That is understandable; the word itself was fairly new. (The words *suicide* and *encyclopedia* seem to have a common vintage and perhaps even a common creator. The vintage is the fifth decade of the seventeenth century, 1642 for *suicide* and 1646 for *encyclopedia;* the creator is Sir Thomas Browne, the author of *Religio Medici.*) However, in

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1777, when the Second Edition of the *EB* was published, it contained a memorable article called "Self-Murder."

"Self-Murder" is one page long. Whatever else can be said about it, it is not dull. It jerks you awake with the first sentence, hectors and shakes you until the finish, and, at the very end, makes an unconvincing attempt to soften its Draconian stance. It has the smell of fire and brimstone, the sound of a wrathful sermon by Cotton Mather. The article begins with a beautifully expressed but horrendously cruel definition: "SELF-MURDER, the pretended heroism, but real cowardice, of the Stoic philosophers, who destroyed themselves to avoid those ills which they had not the fortitude to endure, though the attempting it seems to be countenanced by the civil law, yet was punished by the Athenian law with cutting off the hand which committed the desperate deed." It continues in a vein that joins the religious and the legal:

> And also the law of England wisely and religiously considers, that no man hath a power to destroy life but by commission from God and the author of it; and as the suicide is guilty of a double offence; one spiritual, in invading the prerogative of the Almighty, and rushing into his immediate presence uncalled for; the other temporal, against the king, who hath an interest in the preservation of all his subjects; the law has therefore ranked this among the highest crimes, making it a peculiar species of felony; a felony committed on one's self.

And it concludes with an answer to the obvious question: If the felon is dead, how can human laws punish him?

> They can only act upon what he has left behind him, his reputation and fortune; on the former, by an ignominious burial in the highway, with a stake driven through his body; or the latter, by a forfeiture of all his goods and chattels to the king, hoping that his care for either his own reputation or the welfare of his family would be some motive to refrain him from so desperate and wicked an act. . . . And tho' it must be owned that the letter of the law herein borders a little on severity; yet it is some alleviation, that the power of mitigation is left in the breast of the sovereign, who upon this (as on all other occasions) is reminded by the oath of his office, to execute judgment in mercy.

The last sentence strikes me as conveying the same dubious comfort as a hangman's blessing. The anonymous author of this mean-spirited little article—whose only mention of prevention is its approving note on the custom, prevalent at the time, of besmirching the self-murderer's reputation and confiscating his worldly goods—is clearly far more interested in flagellating the suicide than in keeping him alive.

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By 1788, when the Third Edition was published, the word *suicide* had gained sufficient currency to constitute the article's title. And this time the *EB* had much more to say: five pages' worth, starting with a far briefer and more neutral definition: "SUICIDE, the crime of self-murder, or the person who commits it." The first section of the article is a historical survey of suicide among the Jews, the ancient Greeks, the Brahmins, the Hindus, the Japanese, the Scythians, the tribes of Scandinavia, and others. The tone of this report can be gathered from the paragraph on suicide among the Jews:

> Suicide is one of those crimes which we are led to believe not common among savage nations. The first instances of it recorded in the Jewish history are those of Saul and Ahitophel; for we do not think the death of Samson a proper example. We have no reason to suppose it became common among the Jews till their wars with the Romans, when multitudes slaughtered themselves that they might not fall alive into the hands of their enemies. But at this period the Jews were a most desperate and abandoned race of men, had corrupted the religion of their fathers, and rejected that pure system which their promised Messiah came to Jerusalem to announce.

This anti-Semitic burst was reprinted through four editions, until 1852.

As for the causes of suicide in England, they are ascribed to "the variableness of the climate, the great use of animal food, strong spiritous liquors and to tea, and to the sulphurous exhalations of the pit-coal used as fuel. . . . We are rather surprised that coal is mentioned even as a distant cause of suicide, for it is one of the blessings of our island; and a good coal fire we have always found rather conducive to good spirits rather than injurious to them." It is rare to find such a cozy passage in the staid pages of the *EB*.

Having disposed of history and causation, the article moves on to the aspects that had constituted the entirety of the 1777 article: the morality and legality of suicide. It reasserts that suicide is a felo-de-se (a felony against oneself), a crime against God and the king. But it ends with a sentence that indicates that the times are changing: "Suicide, we find, is a common and increasing evil; but it is a difficult matter to find an effectual remedy. . . . Punishment will not be a preventive, even if it could be always inflicted; and that it is seldom inflicted, though the laws have decreed it, is well known." This concluding emphasis on prevention, complete with a humble acknowledgment of its difficulty, sounds surprisingly modern.

The historical portions of this entry appeared essentially unchanged for sixty-four years in the Fourth (1801), Fifth (1815), Sixth (1820), and Seventh (1830) Editions.

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But changes were coming. The entry for "Suicide" in the Eighth Edition (1852–1860) in many ways repeats the contents of the Seventh. However, it is notable for including landmark quotations from two major nineteenth-century intellectual figures.

The first quotation is from Henry Thomas Buckle, chess prodigy and scientifically minded historian. Buckle believes that "the progress of every people is regulated by principles . . . as certain as those which govern the physical world." Buckle tries to show the constancy of suicide rates over years and points to the folly of enacting laws against it. He states that

> suicide is merely the product of the general condition of society, and that the individual only carries into effect what is a necessary consequence of preceding circumstance . . . [thus] we are able to predict within a small limit of error the number of voluntary deaths for each ensuing period, assuming, of course, that the social circumstances do not undergo marked change.

Buckle's morally neutral stance, which transfers blame from the individual to his society, neatly moves suicide from the purview of religion to that of social science and presages the key role that demography was soon to play in its study.

The second quotation is from the great philosopher and economist John Stuart Mill. In his essay "On Liberty"—in which he opposed any legislation that would interfere with the sale of poisons on the ground that it would exert unnecessary state control over individual freedom—he wrote (and is quoted in the 1860 *EB*) as follows:

> When there is not a necessity, but only a danger of mischief, no one but the person himself can judge of the sufficience of the motive which may prompt him to incur the risk of buying [poison]. In this case therefore (unless he is a child, or delirious or in some state of excitement or absorption incompatible with the full use of the reflecting faculty), he ought, I conceive, be only warned of the danger, not forcibly prevented from exposing himself to it.

This prescient paragraph contains the core arguments of current controversies and debates: Do people own their own lives (and deaths), or are we as a society responsible for saving our fellows from their own errors?

Mill's libertarian voice was destined to be outshouted by the subsequent inundation of articles that concentrated on numbers rather than ethics. The Ninth Edition (1875–1889) contains a six-page article by Wynnard Hooper, a financial journalist who, tellingly, also wrote the pieces on statistics and population. (This was the edition that dominated my childhood; I do not, however, remember reading this article then.)

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Hooper includes five tables of European suicide statistics and one table for certain American states, and discusses these figures in terms of race, sex, climate, population density, occupations, seasons, and methods of suicide. He concludes that "it cannot be said that any satisfactory result has been obtained from these investigations, owing no doubt to the fact that the phenomenon is too minute to furnish numbers large enough for the proper application of the statistical method." His article marks a radical swing to the demographic and statistical approach, reflecting and foreshadowing the work of Morselli, Durkheim, Halbwachs, and Dublin. It cut the pattern for the next hundred years.

The Tenth Edition (1902) contains an unmemorable two-page article, essentially a shortened version of the article in the previous edition, by H. H. Littlejohn, a professor of forensic medicine at the University of Edinburgh. Littlejohn also wrote the article on suicide in the great Eleventh Edition of 1910; it was not one of the edition's high points. Like Buckle and Hooper, Littlejohn regards suicide as "a sign of the presence of maladies in the body politic [which] deserve careful consideration." He asserts that "suicide as a whole conforms to certain general laws, and is influenced by conditions other than mere individual circumstances or surroundings." His article, mainly concerned with British suicide statistics for the 1880s and 1890s, was repeated in the Twelfth (1921) and Thirteenth (1926) Editions.

The article on suicide in the Fourteenth Edition (1929–1940) went through numerous versions in different printings. The first, in 1929, was a two-page article by S. de Jastrzebski, the assistant registrar general of Great Britain, that included updated figures for sex and age and for methods of suicide in England and Wales as well as an interesting and highly topical section on the "Influence of the World War":

> The following figures [for 1911–1914, 1915–1918, 1921–1925], relating as they do to nine of the belligerent countries and two non-belligerents closely affected by war conditions show beyond any possibility of doubt the profound effect produced upon the suicide-rate by the World War. . . . In every case the war period is marked by a notable decline in the suicide-rate. To the theory that nervous strain is one of the prime causes which lead to self-destruction, they give a complete and emphatic contradiction.

The 1955–1961 printings of the Fourteenth Edition contained a short piece by Ruth S. Cavan, an American sociologist, which was perhaps the most succinct and most comprehensive to date. Within the compass of a single page, it includes pithy paragraphs on a variety of subtopics: international comparisons; age, sex, and marital conditions; urban-rural rates;

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methods of suicide; suicide and other means of violent death; and interpretations. Cavan concludes:

> Although suicide rates differ with various social conditions, the explanation does not lie in external forces but in the attitudes and emotions of people. . . . Some people are subjected to greater social pressures than others. Finally, some countries provide more adequate guidance and counselling facilities than others, to which the harassed person may turn for help.

This brief bit of wisdom touches both the inner and the outer worlds of suicide with more empathy than any of Cavan's predecessors had shown.

My turn came in 1973, in an article that deliberately owed little to its forerunners. Its seven pages contained not a single statistical table. (As I reread them in the company of the other articles on my dining table, I felt that in my urge to rescue the study of suicide from the numbing forces of statistics, I had gone too far and given short shrift to the field's legitimate demographic aspects.) The sections included: definition, complexities of definitions, major threads of study, psychological characteristics of suicide, attempted suicide, partial death and substitutes for suicide, suicide and religion, suicide and the law, myths about suicide, romantic suicide and the artist, statistics on suicide, suicide notes, and prevention-intervention-postvention.

One example will suffice to convey the article's general tenor. Under "Main Threads of Suicidal Study," there are several paragraphs about the locus of blame for suicide. Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas Aquinas called suicide a grievous sin and located its source within the deficient person; Rousseau emphasized the natural and innocent state of man and transferred the locus of blame from man to society; Hume tried to sanitize suicide entirely by arguing that it was neither a crime nor a sin; Durkheim focused on society's inimical effects on the individual; and Freud, eschewing the notions of sin and crime, gave suicide back to the individual but put the main locus of action in the unconscious mind. In other words, I attempted to present a variety of views on suicide instead of the single opinions that had dominated most of the earlier articles. My own expressed opinion is that each instance of suicide is a multidimensional event (with biological, physiological, sociocultural, and existential components), but that the main trunk of the suicidal tree is the psychological drama that occurs in the individual's mind: the need to escape from unbearable psychological pain—what I call psychache—tied to some notion of death or cessation as the effective exit. Here is the heart of what—now that I have read all the earlier articles—I feel the *EB* had

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previously omitted: a recognition of suicide as a response to individual human suffering, a tragedy that befalls real people.

This article had a noteworthy personal consequence. For many years—from 1950, when I met him, until his death in 1988 at the age of ninety-five—the psychological epicenter of my intellectual life was Henry A. Murray: physician, psychoanalyst, biologist, Melville scholar, director of the Harvard Psychological Clinic, and author of *Explorations in Personality.* (There is a marvelous portrait of Henry Murray in the winter 1969 issue of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, by then-editor Hiram Haydn.) Murray's peerless writings influenced me more than any others, and I tried to spend as much time as possible in his presence. I was at Harvard for two extended stays—as research associate in the early sixties and as visiting professor in the late sixties, and I flew to Boston as often as I could arrange it. It was one of life's high privileges for me to know him and to be made, by him, much more than I otherwise could have been.

In 1963, in a paper about Melville titled "Dead to the World," Murray had defined suicide as "no more than an urgently felt necessity to stop unbearable anguish, that is, to obtain relief by interrupting the stream of suffering." He asked: "For what is suicide in most instances but an action to put an end to intolerable affect?" You can see right away that my main ideas about the central role in suicide of psychological pain and negative emotions all flow from his fountain. In any event, in February 1973, Harry wrote me:

> Your encyclopaedia article is masterful . . . handsomely written to a marked extent in your own terminology. I couldn't help thinking that this was possibly the timely moment to consider a shift in focus of spirit and mind after lying fallow for a season.

That paragraph changed my life. I knew Harry well enough to put aside his hyperbolic praise and to know that the real meat of that paragraph—his covertly intended message—lay in the serious criticism implied in the second sentence. He was telling me what I already knew inside: that I was temporarily burned out on the topic of suicide and ought to consider a shift of focus for a while. Harry's note resonated with my own suspicion, which I had not fully admitted to myself until I read his words, that my *EB* article had been a mite too discursive and idiosyncratic. Accordingly, I shifted my clinical focus from patients who were suicidal to cancer patients who were coming to death unwillingly. I transformed myself from clinical suicidologist to clinical thanatologist, someone who deals with illness and mourning. When I returned to suicide a few years later, I believe I did so with a refreshed vision of self-destruction as well as a better understanding of the dynamics involved in the wrestling match with death. I would write a more seasoned encyclopedia article today.

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My piece was superseded in the Fifteenth Edition (1974–1984) by a wise and comprehensive five-page article by the late Erwin Stengel, professor of psychiatry at the University of Sheffield. Its most innovative section is headed "Suicide in the Future," and Stengel's predictions are not particularly rosy. He writes:

> It is difficult to imagine man in the future without this potential, which has sometimes been proclaimed as one of the basic human freedoms. There are no prospects of an antisuicidal substance in the foreseeable future. There are certain aspects of present-day society that make a decline in the incidence of suicidal acts unlikely [including] the increased number of the aged . . . the young [who] are more openly aggressive . . . the continued increase in population. The outlook for suicide would be very black indeed if it were not for the strong urge to self-preservation inherent in the individual and in society. The emergence of non-professional movements toward self-help in the struggle against suicide can be seen as a manifestation of this tendency.

Here is a man who, though he thoroughly understood the value of statistics, also understood that suicide is a *philosophical* act. This is manifestly an encyclopedia article and not a novel. But Stengel's empathetic sadness, deepened by his own background as a refugee from the Nazis, clearly shows through his prose and, in my view, makes it finer. Inexplicably, there are printings of the Fifteenth Edition in which Stengel's indispensable essay on suicide does not appear. In these cases, I strongly advise the reader to seek another printing.

In the 1985–1997 printings of the Fifteenth Edition there is a half-page article in the Micropaedia (Stengel's piece is in the Macropaedia). Its concluding paragraph is especially topical:

> No single approach can be expected to succeed in substantially reducing the incidence of suicide, but early detection and treatment of mental disorders are important deterrents. Since the 1950s special centres and organizations for the prevention of suicide have been created in many countries. . . . The telephone is commonly used as a means of communication between lonely and desperate individuals in need of support and advisers who are available by day and night. There is evidence that this kind of service may help to avert suicidal acts.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica*—along with our society—has obviously traveled several light-years since 1777, when it excoriated suicide as cowardly, sinful, illegal, and shameful. The emphasis has shifted to the question, "How can we help?"

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My march through the centuries is complete, but a few ideas still swirl in the wake of my dual obsessions, suicide and the *EB.* The first idea is that there might be something to learn from similar *Britannica* surveys of other socially sensitive tag words. One might look, from 1768 (or whenever the word first appears) to the present date, at *Addiction, Adultery, Childhood, Homosexuality, Insanity,* and so forth. Scholars in different fields could suggest candidates for the word list. Put together, these would yield a lexicographic history of the past two centuries that might give some fresh insights into the evolution of our cultural trends.

My second idea returns to the study of suicide. Why not take a look at the word in *dictionaries* of the past couple of hundred years? Authoritative definitions are important. Indeed, dictionaries might provide us with a microcosm of what was happening in the encyclopedias of their times.

I believe I have good reason, beyond the fact that it is my own field, to think that our society's views of suicide are important to all of us. I learned from a study I once did with the coroner of Marin County, California, that more than a quarter of all deaths—*all* deaths, not just overt suicides—are probably interlaced with threads of imprudence, disregard, excess, indifference, or ennui that bring an end to life sooner than is necessary. In other words, some people who have died what I call "subintentioned deaths" from heart attacks or automobile accidents may have a good deal in common with people who are termed "suicides." In that sense alone, suicide is everybody's business, and we disregard it at the risk of moving up the dates on our own tombstones.

The definition of any important term such as *suicide* gives it power—and also gives it honorific, neutral, or pejorative overtones. Denotation influences connotation. The connotative meanings of a word govern society's responses to it. These community responses can cover a wide range: in the case of suicide, one extreme includes scorn, indifference, and punishment, and the other extreme includes empathy and therapy. And even *within* the realm of therapy, the very modalities are influenced by definition. Whether the therapeutic response is primarily pharmacological (pills), surgical (lobotomy), electrical (shock), institutional (hospitalization), or psychodynamic (talk)—differences that are not trivial—may depend on the inner, unspoken definition of suicide and its connotative associations that one's physician happens to hold.

Anthropologically speaking, dictionaries and encyclopedias are the two key books in any literate society. Each of us lives within (or rebels against) the reigning mores, and those mores are reflected in and created by words. Much of our English-American Zeitgeist is reflected in the long history of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica.* As I look at the piles of articles fanned out on my dining table, I feel that the pages, though they all deal with death, are in some sense alive, and that they are spreading their exhalations into many vast and tiny places.

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The Price of Privilege

"Civil Disobedience" at 150

EVAN CARTON

One hundred and fifty years ago, in a revolutionary season, Henry David Thoreau lectured at the Concord Lyceum on "The Rights and Duties of the Individual in Relation to Government." The philosopher and reformer Bronson Alcott, who came out on that January evening to hear his friend, reported that the mixed crowd of local working people and Boston intellectuals gave Thoreau "an attentive audience." Some months later, Thoreau's lecture was published under the title "Resistance to Civil Government," but we—like its earlier twentieth-century readers, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.—have come to know it as "Civil Disobedience."

For many Americans today, the phrase and the essay "Civil Disobedience" evoke another, somewhat less distant, revolutionary season: not 1848 but 1968, and the "years of hope, days of rage," as Todd Gitlin has called them, that 1968 symbolized and culminated. More than any other piece of American writing, "Civil Disobedience" inspired and authorized the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War protest movement, and the student unrest of the sixties. Teach-ins, debates, and symposia were devoted to the politics of conscience that Thoreau had invented, and between 1967 and 1972, theologians, historians, political philosophers, legal theorists, think tank savants, and Supreme Court justices published more than a dozen books with the phrase "civil disobedience" in their titles. Thirty years ago, readers of Thoreau's great essay—whether they were activists or scholars, and whether they felt permitted or provoked by

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it—understood "Civil Disobedience" to be about the privilege and the pricelessness of personal conscience. Today, my college students understand it differently, and maybe better. For them, and for me, "Civil Disobedience" is about the price of class and national privilege.

"What is perhaps most remarkable about Thoreau," wrote Archibald MacLeish on the album jacket of his 1968 recorded reading of "Civil Disobedience," "is his relation to us in the middle decades of the Twentieth Century." That relation, according to MacLeish, is one of camaraderie in moral struggle and of the shared discovery "that the essential freedom is freedom to dissent." MacLeish's Thoreau is the archetypical morally autonomous romantic, a man with whom "we" naturally identify. (MacLeish took for granted a consensus among subject, writer, and reader.) This is the same Thoreau whom Yale University chaplain and antiwar activist William Sloane Coffin Jr. championed during a 1972 debate on the question: "Civil Disobedience: Aid or Hindrance to Justice?" Thoreau, Gandhi, and King are "heroes to us today," Coffin remarked, "because they represent those individual consciences of the world which, as opposed to the mass mind, best represent the universal conscience of mankind."

A generation ago, "Civil Disobedience" was taken to license a conscientious minority that, however embattled, conceived itself to be freely and securely "opposed" to the errors of the mass mind and the crimes of the mass society. Thousands of readers found justification for holding antiestablishment beliefs ("Any man more right than his neighbors constitutes a majority of one") and, even more crucially, for flouting laws in order to redress social injustices:

> If the injustice is part of the necessary friction of the machine of government, let it go, let it go; perchance it will wear smooth;—certainly the machine will wear out. If the injustice has a spring, or a pulley, or a rope, or a crank, exclusively for itself, then perhaps you may consider whether the remedy will not be worse than the evil; but if it is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter-friction to stop the machine.

Even unsympathetic readers like Coffin's interlocutor Morris Leibman, who assailed the notion that "these deliverances [of individual conscience] are sufficient of themselves . . . to override all other rules or obligations," reinforced the era's common premise: that the modern Thoreauvian was someone who, on personal moral grounds, chose to reject and override the established terms of the social contract rather than someone whose sense of inescapable implication by that contract obliged him to act on social grounds.

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Mario Savio's 1964 bullhorn oration, which inaugurated the free-speech sit-in at Berkeley's Sproul Hall and marked the emergence of radical student activism on campuses across America, exemplified this sixties reading, in which a morally enlightened and unimplicated individual resists an objectified governmental or institutional force. Savio called explicitly for "civil disobedience" and proceeded to define and defend such action in a close paraphrase of Thoreau: "There's a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can't take part. And you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop."

In precisely this spirit, throughout the later years of the decade, middle-class students conscientiously assailed the machine of the U.S. Selective Service System in blithe innocence or denial of the fact that they—having been one of them, I should say we—were the machine's principal beneficiaries, that our adult representatives had built it and managed it in order to save people like us from going to Vietnam. The reading of Thoreau's essay that would have taught us to see our privilege and its price was unavailable to most of us then. To many young people today, it is irresistible.

"Civil Disobedience" narrates and reflects on Thoreau's one-night incarceration in Middlesex County Jail in July of 1846 for refusing to pay a $1.50 Massachusetts poll tax. The apparently random circumstances of his apprehension—he was arrested as he walked into Concord center from his cabin in the woods near Walden Pond to retrieve a shoe that he had left at the shoemaker's to be resoled—are actually germane to a contemporary understanding of the essay. For notwithstanding its mythic image as a private haven within a state of nature, Thoreau's cabin actually sat within the Concord town limits on land owned by Ralph Waldo Emerson. And, indeed, in the developing commercial society of Thoreau's time (not to mention our fully developed one), even the man who proposed to march to the beat of his own inner drummer depended on others for the shoe leather that allowed him to march at all.

More primary, I am suggesting, than the principle of personal conscience in "Civil Disobedience" is Thoreau's unflinching recognition of human interdependency and his acceptance of its moral and political entailments for the citizens of a democracy. Thoreau does not withhold his tax simply to register his private conscientious objection to the Mexican War and the expansion of slavery. His action is based on the premise that his taxpaying citizenship in a democracy that countenances slaveholding and forcibly subdues its weaker neighbor makes him a slaveholder and an imperialist, whatever sentiments he may cherish or whatever votes he may have cast to the contrary. "If a thousand men were

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not to pay their tax-bills this year," he writes, "that would not be a violent and bloody measure, as it would be to pay them."

Thoreau's image of taxpaying, a routine form of civil obedience, as "a violent and bloody measure" conveys the key rhetorical motif and political tactic of "Civil Disobedience": the refusal of the moral buffer that citizens of complex modern societies enjoy by virtue of the characteristically distant, mediated, and indirect relationships between their political or economic actions and those actions' ultimate effects. In other words, one's tax or one's consumer dollar does not simply disappear into the coffers of a faraway government or a spectral corporation; it funds acts that may be immoral, and the funder must therefore acknowledge his role as an accomplice. The essay's central episode—Thoreau's confrontation with his neighbor, the taxgatherer—both exemplifies the practice of civil disobedience and explains why Thoreau sees it as a necessary component not only of democratic politics but of a fully human life:

> I meet this American government, or its representative, the State government, directly, and face to face, once a year, no more, in the person of its tax-gatherer. . . . My civil neighbor, the tax-gatherer, is the very man I have to deal with,—for it is, after all, with men and not with parchment that I quarrel,—and he has voluntarily chosen to be an agent of the government. How shall he ever know well what he is and does as an officer of the government, or as a man, until he is obliged to consider whether he shall treat me, his neighbor, for whom he has respect, as a neighbor and well-disposed man, or as a maniac and disturber of the peace . . .

More than a refusal to contribute monetarily to the Mexican War and to the national accommodation of slavery, Thoreau's act is an effort to dramatize and to redress the attenuation of "face to face" relations between citizen and government and between person and person, neighbor and neighbor. When citizens of a democracy meet their government face to face, Thoreau radically suggests, they are obliged to recognize that its face is their own. In this encounter, the founding figure of American political speech—"government of the people, by the people, and for the people"—must be either embodied or abandoned. That is the burden that Thoreau understands both his neighbor and himself to carry. By "what he is and does," the taxpayer, no less than the taxgatherer, constitutes the government and thus bears personal responsibility for whatever it is and does in his name.

Thoreau knows what some of my students instantly and painfully intuit: that this burden is overwhelming. Qualifying it slightly, he remarks: "It is not a man's duty, as a matter of course, to devote himself to the eradication of any, even the most enormous wrong; he may still properly

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have other concerns to engage him." But, he continues, deliberately using another corporeal image of unbuffered social relations, "If I devote myself to other pursuits and contemplations, I must first see, at least, that I do not pursue them sitting upon another man's shoulders."

Perhaps the most profound and prophetic insight of "Civil Disobedience" is contained in this apparently unremarkable sentence. What Thoreau perceives is not only that it is possible to be "sitting upon another man's shoulders" without knowing it, but that in an increasingly interdependent and stratified society, such a position becomes the norm for many and comes to seem acceptable, even inevitable, to most. This simultaneously private and public state of being, Thoreau further perceives, cripples both the liberal ideal of social justice and the conservative ideal of self-reliance and responsibility. If I devote myself to my private pursuits and contemplations while unknowingly sitting on another's shoulders, I am not only the blithe oppressor of someone else; I lack the autonomy that I imagine myself to possess and, in truth, do not even know who I am. This is Thoreau's point in the passage that directly follows and illustrates his shoulder-sitter metaphor:

> See what gross inconsistency is tolerated. I have heard some of my townsmen say, "I should like to have them order me out to help put down an insurrection of the slaves, or to march to Mexico;—see if I would go;" and yet these very men have each, directly by their allegiance, and so indirectly, at least, by their money, furnished a substitute. . . . Thus, under the name of order and civil government, we are all made at last to pay homage to and support our own meanness. After the first blush of sin, comes its indifference; and from immoral it becomes, as it were, unmoral, and not quite unnecessary to that life which we have made.

The University of Texas undergraduates who read American literature with me are generally intelligent, middle-class, well intentioned, moderately—yet compassionately—conservative, and for the most part unafflicted by the premature cynicism and jadedness that may hang more heavily over America's coastal adolescents than over their inland peers. While these students, as a group, are capable of critically challenging the ideas and attitudes of the authors we study, they are, by temperament, more inclined to sympathy, appreciation, the search for common ground, and even the acceptance of instruction and influence. But, with increasing regularity, vehemence, and manifest discomfort in recent years, they have disliked "Civil Disobedience."

They often can't quite say why. Of course, they share Thoreau's moral opposition to slavery and expansionist warfare, yet they feel repugnance toward his essay and toward him. "I don't know. He's just such a jerk,"

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they say. "He thinks you can just live in your own little dream world." "He's lazy." "Anyone could rationalize anything that way." "He only cared about himself." "He lived off of other people, too." "It's not his argument, it's his tone—the essay's so self-righteous." Yet I invariably hear in their tone, when they say these things, more confusion and hurt than frank indignation. Of all the sociologically powerful and troubling works—many of them long neglected or relatively new—that now find a place in the American literary canon and on the undergraduate syllabus, "Civil Disobedience" is the one that causes them the most pain.

What accounts for this response? At first it surprised me; I assumed, perhaps naïvely, that "Civil Disobedience" was one of those works young people would always be drawn to because it confirmed their own struggles for identity and moral direction. But I now think that it brings them—brings us, materially and educationally advantaged Americans, peacefully attending to our own pursuits and contemplations—face to face with what we already know but rarely acknowledge: that the price we pay today for this seemingly modest privilege is heavy and growing heavier.

The United States, one hundred and fifty years after Thoreau delivered his lecture at the Concord Lyceum, is not enslaving a sixth of its population or pursuing a war of imperial aggression. In some respects, reading "Civil Disobedience" would be less difficult for my students and me if it were. For, were we the immediate beneficiaries of such conditions, our own social positions and options would at least be clearer. "If I have unjustly wrested a plank from a drowning man," Thoreau writes, metaphorically depicting a democratic populace that willingly profited from the theft of black labor and Mexican land, "I must restore it to him though I drown myself. . . . [For] he that would save his life, in such a case, shall lose it." Our case in 1998 is not so stark. But we who possess the resources and the craft to navigate the waters of contemporary American life with some degree of success cannot help seeing many flailing beside our rudders.

The defining national event in the lives of this generation of students is economic stratification—the widening divide between the roughly 20 percent of Americans for whom the last two decades have brought growing shares of opportunity and wealth and the 80 percent whose stagnating or declining standard of living has been coupled with rising financial insecurity and psychological stress. My students—most of them members of or plausible aspirants to the 20 percent—are particularly aware that their prospects in life correlate more closely with competitive educational achievement than ever before. Moreover, they have seen this competition begin in childhood, under increasingly unequal circumstances, as private schools and the better-funded public schools (often effectively privatized through corporate sponsorship and direct parental gifts) af-

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ford the advantaged early access to advanced educational technologies, years of practice on preparatory aptitude and achievement tests, and trained advisers and editors to oversee the composition of college application essays.

If college students suspect that a "winner take all" principle may be at work in the educational process through which they are passing, they see that principle even more plainly in the business and professional world into which they hope to pass. That world, as contemporary students encounter it, is governed by an inverse and ever more polar relationship between opportunity's scale and opportunity's availability—a relationship exemplified by the familiar conjunction of record stock prices and executive salaries with corporate downsizing and the expatriation of production. It is a world that one must train for not only technically but, more than at any time in the last half century, psychologically.

"Civil Disobedience" exposes and undoes the psychological training that in one way or another we have all internalized. It dissolves the buffer between us and the host of distant sins that, in Thoreau's stunningly precise formulation, "from immoral [have become], as it were, unmoral, and not quite unnecessary to that life which we have made." When we "just do it" in our Nikes, my students hear Thoreau whispering: Are you in fact doing it on the shoulders of the Indonesian (or now, because of a recent rise in the price of Indonesian labor, Vietnamese) sweatshop workers who make those Nikes for pennies an hour? When we enjoy scientific pursuits and contemplations in our university's new Jim Bob Moffett Building, Thoreau challenges: Are you sitting on the shoulders of the South Asian islanders whose home Moffett's Freeport Mining Company has been literally grinding to powder while extracting from it billions of dollars worth of minerals? Who among us, peacefully pursuing our private lives, would choose to listen to a constant barrage of such discomfiting questions?

Even if we postmodern shoulder sitters clearly discerned all those who bore our weight and firmly resolved to get down, it would be hard—far harder than it was for Thoreau—to know how to begin. So I don't blame my students for resisting "Civil Disobedience." In fact, since I believe in the educational value of critical counterstatement, and since it would be hypocritical, as well as cruel, to assume a stance of unqualified advocacy when I teach this essay, I encourage them to sharpen their terms of resistance to it. Thoreau is an anarchist, some students come to argue, whereas democratic government depends upon respect for the principles of majority rule and due procedural change. He is an egotist, others claim, a person who falsely holds his own moral understanding to be universal and absolute, whereas in fact morality is variable and relative. He is an isolate, a third group points out, assuming the moral luxury of someone without family or ambition (and with a benefactor who let

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him build a squatter's cabin on his land) to wash his hands of a society in which he has no practical investment. He is a fraud, cries a fourth contingent, dressing up a pleasant breezy night in a comfortable whitewashed room with a picturesque view of the village (and chocolate milk for breakfast) as a martyrdom to conscience.

All of these objections are reasonable. Yet while they may aptly criticize Thoreau's position, none seem effectively to parry his emotional and ethical thrust. If many of my students are wounded by their reading of Thoreau, as—despite their defenses—I believe they are, it is not so much a wound that his words deliver as one that they expose. This wound is the price of privilege. It is a price paid in various currencies by all of us for whom life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness remain inalienable rights and reasonable expectations. It is paid in nameless, low-frequency fear; in deepening political cynicism; in the curious mixture of adulation and contempt that our society heaps on celebrities, its symbols of unfettered yet undeserved personal privilege; in our resigned familiarity with the cardboard messages of the damaged and deprived Americans who daily stand at highway intersections and with the saga of deprivation and damage serialized on the nightly news.

This is the tax that Thoreau collects, even from the students who resist him—civil young people insufficiently inured to "the necessary friction," as Thoreau puts it, of a social engine that seems theirs to ride but not to steer. That such young people incur this soul tax in reading "Civil Disobedience" may be regarded, to paraphrase MacLeish, as what is bleakest about Thoreau's relation to us in the last decade of the twentieth century. Yet it may also be seen as what is most hopeful. For it testifies to the unlikely currency—the expenditures of the sixties notwithstanding—of F. O. Matthiessen's 1941 declaration on Thoreau: "His vitality as a revolutionary is still unexhausted."

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Puzzlement

TIM MORRIS

It is a terrible thing to admit, but I love jigsaw puzzles. It is a terrible thing to admit because I am a professor of English. I work in Texas, in the heartland, where I often get the impression that I am expected to be an ambassador from high culture to Middle America. Granted this authority, I could confess to loving almost anything else without shame. Baseball? A taste I share with philosophers and poets. *Bewitched?* The subject of Cultural Studies dissertations. Wonder Bread with gravy? My culture's authentic cuisine. But when I say that I have a taste for jigsaw puzzles, I place myself beyond a social and intellectual pale.

In my crowd, there isn't a single way in which jigsaw puzzles constitute an acceptable taste. First of all, there's their status as reproductions. I know academics who would as soon march naked in a Fourth of July parade as own reproductions of art—unless of course the reproduction is on a poster for an exhibition at a sufficiently tony and remote museum. Worse still, most jigsaw puzzles are not even reproductions of *good* art. They are reproductions of kitsch. In the 1950s and '60s, jigsaw puzzles supplied unconscious kitsch; there apparently were people then who had a genuine appreciation for fluffy cats with big eyes, groups of sad clowns, rodeo cowboys in action, and blurry photos of the Tetons. But for today's more discriminating puzzle consumer, the kitsch is conscious, manufactured, marketed. Collages of baseball cards, arrangements of old soda pop labels, grainy rotogravures of vintage aircraft, enormous collections

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of teddy bears, *sharp* photos of the Tetons: the closer these images approach tastefulness, the more quickly they recede from it. A puzzle can transform art into kitsch, the way various forms of kitsch reproduction have in fact transformed Leonardo's *Last Supper.* The jigsaw is a crucible for generating bad taste.

Worse still, doing jigsaw puzzles indicates a complete lack of originality. Your work is literally cut out for you. The puzzle is in a subclass of the kit or the model—in fact, in the lowest possible stratum of that subclass. Building a model ship from a kit is just barely respectable, because the product at least takes obvious skill and can charm the eye. And as anyone who has built such models knows, their most sophisticated form requires "kit-bashing": scavenging bits from this kit and that, importing unsupplied materials, redrawing the instructions to suit yourself. You can't kit-bash a jigsaw puzzle. Much as I might like to put Homer Simpson in the Sistine ceiling, the damn piece just won't fit.

No, puzzles belong to that dreadful part of the field that includes paint-by-numbers, shrink art, and woodburning kits prestamped with the faces of all forty-two U.S. presidents. The products all look terrible—their most endearing quality, really. Yet encoded in all such kits, however ghastly, is an echelon of skills, one that puzzles naturally share. A bigger puzzle, with smaller details, means a harder task: a fractal multiplication of difficulty. So you graduate from a twelve-piece floor puzzle of a puppy to a hundred-piece rendering of Batman swooping down from a building to a thousand-piece view of the Battle of Chapultepec—and beyond, into the new 3-D puzzles that let you build up and out until St. Paul's Cathedral covers not just your dining room table but a good bit of the airspace above.

A child's cognitive development can be traced by these levels of ability, of course; IQ tests often time how quickly a child can assemble a puzzle. What was seductive for me as I grew, though, was the implied promise that adult talent could be achieved via such ladders of skill. Having mastered the hundred-piecers, I could do five hundred; having done two thousand, I could do—what? A Borgesian nightmare puzzle of a map of the United States in 1:1 scale, covering the entire continent?

One of the milestones of passage between childhood and adulthood is therefore that moment when it is no longer a compliment to be told you have done a jigsaw puzzle well. What's to do, exactly? Is there a technique involved? Of course there is; it's simply not a technique you can be proud of, nor is it one that sharpens your skills the way some amusements can. Jigsaw puzzling does not improve hand-eye coordination, or balance, or concentration, or aerobic fitness. The damn thing just sits there in a thousand pieces, commanding you to restore it to the form it took before a machine in some distant factory cut it apart.

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If puzzles were absolutely mechanical, however, they would reduce their fans to automatons. My mother, who taught me puzzling, was a fanatic. Every piece had to be laid flat, turned upright, oriented by probable direction. Then the edge pieces, with their straight-rule sides, had to be lined up and assembled to form the frame. Then the interior pieces had to be marshaled into groups by color or theme, guided to the correct part of the table by strict reference to the picture of the completed puzzle on the box top.

It's a time-honored strategy, of course, and one that is recommended by puzzle manufacturers. My wife and I recently bought a four-thousand-piece monstrosity, a medieval *mapamundi* from Spain, that came with pithy instructions: *(1) Forme el marco exterior del puzzle; (2) Agrupe las piezas restantes; (3) Vaya montando el puzzle poco a poco.* Ah, yes, but there is the difficulty. *Vaya montando poco a poco,* certainly; it can't all be done at once—but how to get from here, the maximum chaos, the four thousand tiny bits scattered everywhere, to there, the finished picture?

As it turned out, the *mapamundi* gave us a couple of months to contemplate this question. My wife and I have different styles. She formed the lines, working inward from the picture's salient outer points toward its vaguer, grayer, less formed expanses. I went to the expanses first. Nothing gives me greater pleasure than a jumble of similarly colored interior pieces. The brown of a mountainside, the blue of a sky, the waves of an ocean—these are the things I live for in a puzzle.

I don't like to work from the box—or in the case of the *mapamundi,* from one of its charming quirks, a foldout poster that replicated both the box top and the puzzle, offering a third layer of iconography. I prefer to see what colors fit together—or when the pieces are all the same color, to concentrate on the shapes. The ultimate step in this direction is to turn the puzzle over and do its back, without reference to the printed design. I take irrational comfort from the notion that this is also how one of the greatest scientific puzzlers, the late Mary Leakey, did puzzles when she was a child. The practice of fitting together monochrome bits of stuff made Leakey the world's best reconstructor of fossil skulls. (It is also true, according to Oliver Sacks, that some autistic savants are able to complete jigsaw puzzles equally well whether the pieces are face up or face down.)

On occasion, when assembling a puzzle, I will not talk for an entire afternoon. My eyes lose focus as I search for the shape of the needed piece, for the venue that the found piece needs. Do I sense images directly or do I necessarily mediate images through words? Some words come easily: a piece is male or female, left-handed or right-handed, depending on its curves and bulges. But these terms fit only orthogonally cut puzzles and their Cartesian axes. Some of the better puzzles have a random, squiggly grid, with pieces that can be tiny or huge, loopy or

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straight, where the straight pieces don't all fit on the sides and the bays in the female pieces may simultaneously accept two different peninsulas from the male ones. Where are the words for these? I compose a new poem in my mind for each piece I hunt. That brown one, a bend, a hook—it's shaking hands with a large egg (or is it an oyster?); it's leaning backward over a rock, its legs splayed, its waist demure or gripped or flattened out.

A jigsaw puzzle is, ultimately, a lonely thing. It seems perfectly appropriate that its most famous cultural image is that of Dorothy Comingore in her huge living room at Xanadu, lost in a Kane-sized puzzle as she lets slip all contact with the bloated Orson Welles. There are few instances of jigsaw puzzles building community. My university keeps a stack of puzzles in its writing center, but they aren't for the students to bond over; they're for tutors, burned out from correcting sentence fragments, who come to fit them together in order make themselves feel whole again.

At their worst, jigsaw puzzles become a filter that organizes your perceptions of the world. Buried every night in a thousand-piecer that is taking its time to come together, you emerge in the morning to see the outside world as more puzzle than reality. It isn't the house across the street that I see on these mornings, as I go outside to get the paper: it is a vast puzzle field, with its easy and hard bits, its lines, its die cut, its frame. A three-dimensional task, like making the coffee, must intrude before I can let go of this dreamy sense of having to piece together the world.

One French word for puzzle is *casse-tête,* "brain-breaker." So it can be, if you let it go too far. Not only are frustration and panic part of all good puzzles, but the best—that is to say, the most difficult—will naturally encourage a sort of paranoia. Most puzzlers have experienced, early on in a large puzzle, the maddening sense that a piece is missing. It is the king's nose or the dinosaur's ear, and by God, you have looked for it everywhere in the pile, and it is so bloody obvious that if it were here you'd have seen it by now. The further you get into a puzzle, of course, the less likely it is, statistically, that this could be true. If you've completed Happy, Sleepy, Dopey, Doc, and Grumpy without incident, what are the odds that a piece of Sneezy was never there? It is in fact an illusion of proprioception, an eternal problem in subjectivity. The line you're in at the supermarket is always the slowest, the light you are trying to make always turns red, and the puzzle piece you most want to find is naturally the very one that is unfindable. Someday you will assemble Sneezy, only to find—it is a virtual certainty!—that a piece of Bashful is missing.

There comes in every puzzle, moreover, a moment when you are sure that you will never finish. There are two thousand pieces, half of which are blue sky, and in the thousand blue bits you've piled together, you cannot find even two that interlock. An hour passes with no progress.

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You force method onto the madness. Grabbing one blue piece from the pile, you hold it steady and fit the next blue piece alongside it every possible way it can go: right, left, top, bottom, for every projection or indentation. The two pieces don't fit, so you cast one into a discard pile and take another. One pile grows, the other shrinks, another hour passes, none of the pieces fit, indifference gives way to despair, and you get up and see what's on Nickelodeon. But you come back the next day and—hello, what's this? You recognize that hook on that piece, it fits right in the eye on the one over here! And they match this third piece, and this fourth . . . and in a matter of minutes, a dozen pieces go together and a little patch of sky shows over the horizon.

It's getting harder all the time, though, to supply the materials for such triumphs. Jigsaw puzzles are like any other commodity. They wage a constant battle for consumer attention. The old standby, the thousand-piecer with a theme from art or nature, is therefore becoming as difficult to find as a container of plain yogurt. Instead there are borderless puzzles; puzzles that are all one color; puzzles whose pieces are all the same shape; puzzles with triangular domino-like pieces that fit into a frame in millions of possible combinations, only one of which is correct; puzzles that have a design on the front and a design on the back, and that (the box assures us) are punched equally from both sides, so it is impossible to tell which side is the front and which the back; puzzles that, once completed, become games (escape the dungeon, solve the mystery, become the railway baron); "doodling" puzzles, in which you fit shapes together in various ways to create your own pattern, giving the (false) impression that you are unlocking your hidden creative talents; puzzles with a handful of extra pieces that don't fit. This last variety vaunts the claim—a claim shared by at least a hundred other puzzles—that it is the most difficult puzzle in the world.

Marketers, in their thirst for innovation, have failed to see that the point of a puzzle is to complement boredom. Even to *augment* boredom: to bring boredom, as Prozac does serotonin, up to a safe and sustainable level in the brain. I don't want my puzzles to be a party centerpiece; they belong in the back room, on the old card table. A puzzle in progress is fluid and compliant. It fills whatever part of your mind you want it to. When you are too tired to do anything else, it can be the foreground: the puzzle is all in all. When you're preoccupied, the puzzle can be the backdrop for thought. When you want to half-watch TV or half-listen to a ball game, the puzzle offers its assistance to the other half.

I don't want to assemble a jigsaw puzzle in order to be edified, or to find out what's on TV, or to answer a set of trivia questions, or even to crack the secret code that leads to a $20,000 grand prize. Some of us have too much stress in our lives, and our boredoms are an end in themselves. There are days when I can't face much activity. I just want to

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fall asleep face first in a puzzle and wake with little die-cut pieces embedded in my brow.

I suppose—in fact, I remember—that this relentless search for innovation was ever thus. When I was a child, in the 1960s, there were puzzles in tubes, puzzles in bags, puzzles in the shape of strange unsquare objects. I had a circular puzzle with the design of a pizza that smelled like a pizza—in fact, *exactly* like a pizza: oregano and cardboard. I had puzzles with mixes of ordinary die-cut shapes and strange representative shapes—fish, lizards, stars, moons, fire trucks—like the infant floor puzzles with large toylike pieces cut to match the things they picture.

Those infant puzzles—wooden panels with cutouts in the shape of vehicles or animals, the pieces with little pegs attached so that the child can lift them out and replace them—are not really puzzles, at least in the sense of being disassembled patterns. I've sat and watched children "do" them and wondered if, to a child, they are the cognitive equivalent of adult puzzles, or something else entirely. There's nothing cryptic, nothing *puzzling* about putting a police car into an outline of a police car. In fact, most children end up playing with the police car instead of fitting it into its appointed space. Most children end up treating puzzles as toys, in any case: strewing the pieces, chewing the pieces, lining them up, making them talk to one another. Then at age seven or eight there is a burst of grown-up purpose, a new efficiency, a drive toward a goal.

Children's puzzles are a bastion of high quality, despite (and because of) their alternative status as toys. Most of them are still cut from wood, or at least from Masonite, and are therefore among the last remaining puzzles to which the word *jigsaw* can properly be applied. A jigsaw is a saw with a thin, flexible blade that can make fine, intricate cuts in wood. But most adult "jigsaw" puzzles are actually die-cut cardboard. And they are getting worse all the time. The die doesn't cut all the way through. You shake the pieces out and half of them are still attached; then the backing tears, and you're left with lumpy and uneven bits. The pieces are thin and they break easily and they won't lie flat. It is a fallen world we grow up into.

Of course, nothing is as good as it used to be; jigsaw puzzles are just a barometer of the age. I think back now to the things my grandparents used: tortoiseshell combs, glass pop bottles, steel beer cans, bottle-tops lined with thick cork, leather briefcases, horsehair cushions, heavy steel bathtubs, cast-iron skillets, electrical cords wrapped in tough fiber, real rubber everywhere. People must have been giants in the 1950s, to move among such sturdy, massive objects. Their possessions were like the stones that Homer has his bygone heroes lift in the *Iliad,* stones that no two men alive today could lift. We are doubtless more efficient now; things are lighter and stronger and use less energy. But every time some-

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one over thirty-five gets into a car or opens a bottle, there's a faint, bothersome nostalgia for the solidity of the past, a sense that we are living in a time of shortages and succedanea. So it is when I hold up a frayed bit of cardboard and recall the jigsaws of old.

But nostalgia is deceiving. I associate the actual puzzles I have lived through mainly with defeat and depression. Perhaps I spend so much time with them now in an effort to recoup something forever lost. There was one puzzle I could never do, never even come *close* to doing. It was a Civil War scene, about a thousand pieces. Like so many children of the centennial decade of the 1960s, I thought about the Civil War a lot. It was impressed on me as a duty; there was nothing else quite so important or quite so glamorous. The puzzle was reproduced from a realistic oil painting of horses and men dying amid clouds of smoke. The earth was reddish brown and the air was brownish red, and you couldn't tell where they met. With my mother's help I pieced together the frame of the puzzle, and then we stared at the hundreds of pieces that remained. Somewhere, in the picture's only inlet of light, there was a Confederate battle flag; I found the two pieces that composed it and joined them. That was as far as we got. That flag floated in the lonely expanses of the frame, a real Lost Cause, as we sifted through the mountain of muddy, bloody, featureless pieces dumped in the middle of the table like the constituent parts of a sanguinary canvas by Jackson Pollock.

It was unusual for my mother to leave a puzzle unfinished. Washing and wringing and drying and sprinkling and ironing and mopping and polishing in a ceaseless cycle, she needed some escape, and she chose puzzles. She did many, with great proficiency, but she did not know what to do with them once they were done. The advent of puzzle locks—shellacs that could glue and preserve a puzzle—were a boon to her. Permanence never tempted me. Part of my pleasure came from putting a puzzle together in thirty hours and then breaking it apart in thirty seconds, just as part of a three-year-old's pleasure in his elaborate block tower comes from knocking it down. But my mother, needing to justify the hours she had spent, resisted taking apart what she had striven so mightily to put together. She did not frame or hang her productions. We lived in small houses, and even a few glued puzzles would have crowded everything else off the walls. She just kept them together in the backs of closets. What did the finished puzzle offer? Information, memory, validation?

My mother was a fierce patriot of Illinois, where she was born, and after we moved to New Jersey, she attached herself to all things Illinoisan. As her midwestern accent became stronger in the face of the hideous diphthongs of South Jersey, she filled her spare time with cultural icons of the Land of Lincoln. One of these was a large puzzle map of her native state, the kind that shows famous people, cities, rivers, products, and wildlife. Being Illinois, the map had little variety to offer; there were lots

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of ears of corn, a few trees, a river or two, some barns. Chicago crowded brazenly into one corner, leaving the rest of the field to pictures of President Lincoln and General Grant and to the quintessential heartland towns—Rockford, Danville, Springfield, Normal.

The expanse of this boring state, laid open to the observer with its perky little annotations, was pathetic, no matter how you looked at it. My mother looked at it and shellacked it together and slid it under the bed, where it remained for years, melting slightly in the summers and attracting strata of dust in the winters. Like a Flaubert's parrot of the Middle American imagination, this puzzle lay beneath my parents' bed, far from Illinois, the relic beneath their altar.

Maps, for many reasons, are ideal subjects for puzzles. They are finely detailed, chipper, ostensibly educational. If you have any head for geography you can do them without looking at the box, another plus. Fine old maps like our *mapamundi* are art in themselves. When I was young I learned the states and their capitals from a puzzle of the United States in thin pastel plastic, one state to a piece. I could easily have choked on anything smaller than Montana. The memory of my childhood state puzzle was so strong that I bought my son, even before he was born, a true wooden jigsaw of the United States. As a toddler he would struggle with the pieces while I looked on carefully to make sure that he didn't put Vermont into his diaper. "Hello?" he'd say, picking up Minnesota and holding it to his ear like a telephone. Before he could speak, he knew and treasured the shape of Texas: big, fat, and central, it seemed to hold the rest of the states on its shoulders.

Like no other nation, America is in love with the utterly accidental outlines of its provinces. Every state is filled with representations of its borders—every state, that is, that has avoided the fate of Wyoming or Colorado and is an organic shape instead of an arbitrary polygon. When I drive across state lines today and see the proliferations of Georgias or Ohios on road signs, I marvel: I am really *there,* inside that shape that has always been just a puzzle piece to me. I shake my son's states out of their frame and put them back in according to where I've been and where I haven't, filling the hours of caring for a toddler with games of memory (Frankfort? Pierre? Charleston?) and broodingly drafting amateur proofs of the four-color map theorem.

Not every design is as natural and elegant as a map. In the search for a good puzzle subject, one easily becomes a snob—insofar, of course, as one can be a snob of the lowest possible brow. A while ago someone gave my wife and me a puzzle of a fantasy scene, a nymph meeting a dragon or warlock of some sort, all nimbuses and badly drawn vegetation. The puzzle was astonishingly difficult and intensely irritating; it would have been the labor of weeks to complete the product of the

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tawdriest sword-and-sorcery imagination. We gave up the attempt in fine disdain and turned to Wallace and Gromit.

Listen to me talk! What am I demanding from my wastes of time, that they secretly nourish my soul? Of course I am. When I am bored out of my mind I sit down and ask a puzzle to bore me back into my mind. The whole project of puzzling is inexorably satisfying, as teleological as time's arrow itself. With any other hobby, you aim at a golden mean that can easily be overshot: you must be careful not to sand that tabletop once too often or leave the soufflé in the oven five minutes too long. But a puzzle is the pattern of all progress. You never take a piece out that you've put in, and every piece in means one less in the pile to be *put* in. And just as there was that awful moment early on, when you knew it would never go together, there's that complementary rush of power later on, at the moment when you've turned the corner and you know that at some point in the not too distant future you're going to put in the last piece.

W. S. Merwin's poem "For the Anniversary of My Death" speaks of living through the date of your death over and over: "Every year without knowing it I have passed the day," the day on which you will, eventually, die. It's just like your birthday; you've lived through it just as many times, but you cannot mark it on your calendar or have the least notion of which day it will be. A puzzle presents an analogue. When you first tip the thousand pieces out of the box, how can you possibly say which one will be the last to go in? There are a few unlikely candidates: that corner piece, that capital city. You're unlikely to die on the 29th of February, for that matter. But somewhere, that last piece must, inescapably, be lurking.

Few endeavors have a climax like the moment in which you can foresee—even if you cannot yet identify—the last piece. Certainly writing doesn't, what with its circlings back and tearings down and revisions. Yet writing is respectable and puzzling is not. However, if writing about a puzzle can descend to the level of puzzling, puzzling great artworks can ascend to the level of criticism. I recently spent about a month on a six-hundred-piecer of one of Monet's views of the Japanese bridge at Giverny. I knew the painting well because it hung in the art museum at my graduate school. The bridge itself consists of three arcs over the water, the arcs supported by four vertical lines, the balusters. Behind the bridge is foliage; below, the inevitable water lilies in two main ranks, floating in the reflection of the foliage. The bridge itself seems to have no reflection. It's a perfect subject for a puzzle. Almost every one of the six hundred pieces is green.

I should say I *thought* I knew this painting well. You do not truly know a work of art until you put it together as a jigsaw puzzle. No one can elbow you away; you're not several feet from it but several inches; in fact, you touch every part. As *Pont Japonais* took shape, I realized that what I

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had thought was a complicated work was terribly simple. The foliage and its reflection are just a stippling of shades of green, largely without detail. Over the green Monet has drawn his brush only a few times, in what look to be almost unmixed colors. The lilies are little dabs of red, pink, and blue, atop some horizontal dotted blue lines. The bridge rises above the water, superimposed, mechanically drafted, intensely compelling. Once drawn, by compass and straightedge, it has been colored in the simplest way possible: white for the front of the bridge, blue and green for the bottom, blue for the right-hand side, where it lies in shade—mere swipes of plain color.

For all its simplicity, this image was so enchanting that my son and I drew it for weeks afterward with crayon on sheets of paper, or with chalk in our driveway. I began to feel like Richard Dreyfuss frantically drawing pictures of Devils Tower in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind,* possessed by an image I could not get out of my head. In Chicago on business, I had to head to the Art Institute to see its version of *Pont Japonais.* I do not think that I would have had this kind of connection to the painting if I'd merely known the canvas itself. It's an innovative pedagogy, perhaps, for an art appreciation class: required texts include a six-hundred-piece puzzle of a major work, to accompany lectures on technique.

If I seem to have been assembling a defense of the cultural value of jigsaw puzzles while assembling my Japanese bridge, it is only a very limited one. Whatever psychological benefits or critical insights they bring, puzzles are still a thoroughly debased form of social capital, and they circulate mostly as metaphors for something else—for lack of imagination, for time-wasting, for childishness. At best, they are a trope for the soluble mystery.

In some cases, the *barely* soluble mystery. I have completed many difficult puzzles, of which the very hardest had only about 250 pieces. My wife and I discovered it in a yard sale in New Jersey. I believe that the sellers were visiting it on another family like a curse, a sort of Monkey's Paw of the New Brunswick subdivisions. The puzzle had a steel backboard; its pieces were thin, flexible magnets. The benefit of this was that the pieces stayed put and you could, I suppose, assemble the thing on the front of your refrigerator. The downside was that the puzzle would demagnetize anything within a five-foot radius.

The design of this fiendish puzzle was an out-of-focus black-and-white photograph of trees in winter. One or two pieces were all white or mostly black, but the vast majority were white with random black striations. As in all the best puzzles, the die was orthogonal and the pieces largely alike, mostly two-male two-female. Hence, we had dozens of pieces that were almost exactly the same shape and color. The magnetic feature quickly became a pain in the neck, with the pieces adhering to one another,

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sticking to the wrong place on the board and having to be peeled off, and allowing no wiggle room.

It took weeks just to do the border. We'd put a piece in a likely spot and realize that any other spot was just as likely. We had no picture to go by—for fifty cents at a yard sale, who expects one?—and even if we had, the suggestion of a few gray lines heading this way and a few gray lines heading that way wouldn't have constituted much of a blueprint. Yet we persevered. Our lives became a nightmare. After a month or two, the puzzle came together. Finally we came to the last day, the last piece, the only one left—and we *couldn't figure out which way it went in.* We had to drop it on the puzzle, then turn it 90, 180, then 270 degrees before we achieved success.

It was the strangest feeling of utter liberation, the completion of a task of monumental pointlessness. We had learned nothing—not even puzzle technique, the puzzle being too idiosyncratic for its lessons to be transferred. The puzzle wasn't even good-looking. From across the room its branchy surface looked like a piece of crumpled newspaper. And it remains one of the unforgettable achievements of my life.

We don't have the branch puzzle anymore. We passed its curse along in a yard sale of our own. But we've kept many others, mostly broken up the minute we finished them and put back in their boxes. With jigsaw puzzles, the journey really is the destination; very few of them are worth a glance the moment after the last piece goes in. But while one is on that journey, the assembly of a puzzle can have all the rhythms of a life: the beginning, with its effort and wonder and hard-won ability to fit a few things into a pattern; the long boredom of the middle, its steady calendrical ticking off brightened by sudden flashes and flurries of activity (the puzzle's analogues to falling in love, getting a new job, having a child); and the end, the curiously quick slip into completion followed by the utter indifference of everyone else to the finished item.

We live, in the middle mostly, for those sudden glimpses of clarity. For weeks on end through one dark winter, a scene of cats in a tropical jungle sustained me. The days were mostly fronds and lianas, against an undertone of crumbling mahogany. But every so often there was a moment when a set of pieces would group themselves from every corner of the table, and before I knew it, a tiger would spring from the shadows, a panther would appear in silhouette high in the canopy. And when that small element was composed, I would run my fingers, as a child does, over the smooth gloss of the puzzle's surface, which for so many days had been a landscape of mesas and pits, and sigh a little at the wonder of anything, ever, taking shape from the entropy I had been handed.

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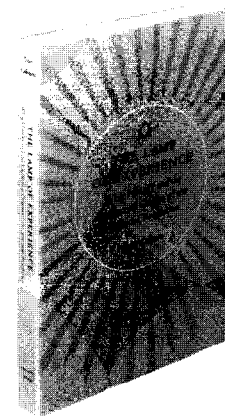
A Classic Work on America's Founding

THE LAMP OF EXPERIENCE
WHIG HISTORY AND THE INTELLECTUAL ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION



By Trevor Colbourn

". . . a joy to read."
—Lucius F. Ellsworth

In a landmark work, a leading scholar of the eighteenth century examines the ways in which an understanding of the nature of history influenced the thinking of the founding fathers. As Jack P. Greene has observed, "[The Whig] conception saw the past as a continual struggle between liberty and virtue on one hand and arbitrary power and corruption on the other." Many founders found in this intellectual tradition what Josiah Quincy, Jr., called the "true old English liberty," and it was this Whig tradition—this conception of liberty—that the champions of American independence and the crafters of the new republic sought to perpetuate. Colbourn supports his thesis—that "[I]ndependence was in large measure the product of the historical concepts of the men who made it"—by documenting what books were read most widely by the founding generation. He also cites diaries, personal correspondence, newspapers, and legislative records.

Trevor Colbourn is President Emeritus of the University of Central Florida.

310 + xxiii pages. Prefaces, appendices, index.

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THE UNCERTAIN ART

Narcissus Looks into the Laboratory

SHERWIN B. NULAND

Among the many ancient Greek medical writings that scholars of an earlier generation credited to Hippocrates, there is a particularly interesting essay that deals with the education of a physician. "Law"'s brief length of only five paragraphs, and certain of its trenchant observations, caused one translator to call it a "quaint little piece" and voice regret that "it has strangely been neglected by scholars." His concern was no doubt based on the fact that this particular gem contains more good sense per line than any of the approximately sixty treatises once thought to have been written by the Father of Medicine himself.

Some of the statements in "Law" are more aphoristic than the vast majority of those in *The Aphorisms* and exceed them in universality. And as for being timeless—well, try this one, about time itself: "It is time which imparts strength to all things and brings them to maturity." I found myself thinking about just this statement only a few days ago, while reading a newspaper account of yet another triumph in the world of molecular biology, this one being page-one-headlined by the exuberant *New York Times*: "In Big Advance in Cloning, Biologists Create 50 Mice."

Imagine that—the biologist as creator! Or, perhaps before too long, as Creator.

Not only did the researchers "churn out clones of adult mice," announced the *Times,* but they even went so far as to make clones of clones. One authority at Princeton University (to whom the article refers as a "mouse geneticist") "described the speed at which the cloning had progressed as breathtaking." He went further: "'Absolutely,' he said, 'we're going to have cloning of humans.'" According to the mouse expert, even the safeguards of strict scientific protocol and the delay required to perfect the technique in monkeys would not prevent in vitro fertilization clinics from being able to add human cloning to their bag of tricks within five to ten years.

It's not enough that we are plunging pell-mell toward cloning one another. Even the genetic enhancement of laboratory-crafted people is now being talked about. This would mean quite a bit more than the current therapeutic aims of introducing genes into patients to fight or ward off disease or of cloning for the purposes of tissue and organ transplantation. Changes are now being considered that would improve the very germplasm, the permanent heredity, of these "created" clones. Traits thus made inherent would be potentially transferable to every succeeding generation. This goes beyond fantasizing about Bionic Man to conjuring up the dream of Designer Man.

The velocity of our head-over-heels rush to clinical fulfillment comes into perspective when we recall that only a bit more than a year and a half has passed since the newborn Dolly first made those appealing sheep's eyes at the television cameras. At that time, no serious scientist believed that an attempt at reproducing the feat in humans was possible within a decade. And now we are being told that a decade is the outer limit within which the process may be not only accomplished but even made available to the public just for the asking (and the paying).

Meanwhile, other researchers are less concerned with crafting an improved version of the present generation for transmission into the next than with playing around with a project that has been dear to mankind's heart ever since our species first made its appearance in dim prehistory. For these scientists, it is not

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sufficient to clone our bettered selves into interminable generations; they are experimenting with techniques that might have the potential to make some members of our generation themselves interminable. Their goal is the lengthening of life beyond any span that clinical and public health advances (which have already added some thirty-five years to our life expectancy during this century) might anticipate. What they are talking about now is an increase not only in expectancy, but in the very life span granted by nature and evolution to our and every other species.

Noting that a structure found at the end of the DNA molecule, called a telomere, decreases in size each time a cell divides, these researchers have been working with a gene that codes for the enzyme telomerase. Telomerase has the ability to maintain or even increase the length of the telomere. In the laboratory, such manipulation has resulted in a marked rise in the number of times a cell can divide before dying. As recently as two years ago, responsible molecular biologists scoffed at the idea that this work could extend the normal life span, but no longer. Telomerase is now a hot research topic.

There is something just a bit scary about the way researchers describe what they see in their experiments. They say the cells are *rejuvenated*, a word reminiscent of the age-old searchings for a source of renewed vigor that culminated earlier in this century in the "magical" effects of monkey gland extracts and other such nostrums for perpetuating youth.

Not only would some of the current rush to fruition have been deemed absurdly futuristic only a few years ago, but the often overheated media have flavored their reports of it with the promise of imminent wondrous applications to human happiness. Earlier this year, the selfsame *New York Times* reported telomerase's extension of cellular reproductive lines with a detailed story, in the lead paragraph of which was posed a tantalizing question: "If cells can be made to live indefinitely, can people be made immortal?" The large headline over the article read, "Longevity's New Lease on Life." Can anyone be blamed for believing that this fantasy is close to becoming reality?

The media are not without reason for enthusiasm. Daring statements are being made by otherwise cautious scientists about the implications of their work. As one after another of nature's hitherto closely guarded secrets is revealed by their relentless ingenuity, researchers have begun to allow themselves to think the previously unthinkable.

Some of their rumination, like that of the mouse geneticist, is public. As in his case, it generally takes the form of pithy quotes delivered over telephone lines in response to questing science writers, who then rush them into print for immediate consumption by a public eager to believe that a New Jerusalem of health and longevity is at hand. Perhaps egged on by a recently acquired prophetic image, many biomedical scientists have abandoned the restraint that has long characterized their breed. To the usual unbounded zeal for the next research step has been added a less usual unbounded zeal for the immediacy of clinical use. Because of a few awe-inspiring discoveries, many ordinary citizens have changed their opinion about how far we dare to look ahead and how fast we dare to go. Caught up in the infectious excitement of biomedical science and its commentators, we seem to have forgotten about the leavening effect of time's passage, and the maturity it can bring.

Our society has become very much like an overstimulated child. Perhaps such an analogy can be taken even further. The byproducts of biomedicine's brilliance have rubbed off on all of us, even those without the training or background to grasp fully the factual basis of the advances. The kind of child our society resembles just now is one whose intelligence far exceeds his maturity. Every teacher and every parent knows what a formula for disaster that can be. Among some of the scientists themselves, the brilliance-to-maturity ratio may be strikingly higher than among the general population, and not only because they tend to be smarter than the rest of us.

This might be the time to do just what wise teachers do when faced with such a situation in the classroom: a child whose intellectual attainments far outstrip his ability to deal with the consequences of being so smart, a child who is likely, therefore, to make mistakes in using his genius that will ultimately harm himself and

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others. What a wise teacher does with such a child is not to promote him to the next grade when the school year ends. The child stays where he is until his social abilities catch up to his brainpower. Years ago, it was the custom to push such brilliant kids forward rapidly through the grades, but the price—in psychological illness and even breakdowns—proved to be very high. Too many of these bright youngsters never fulfilled the promise of their intellectual gifts because they were not given the time to mature. Had they been kept back, they would have been allowed to grow up enough to comprehend what might happen as a result of their genius.

What I am suggesting here is a brake on the application of technologies whose consequences we can at present only begin to contemplate. For the first time in the annals of scientific research, we are faced with discoveries whose implications to society go far beyond the community of researchers, physicians, and those patients who would be directly involved. We may have reached the point where we can no longer afford to permit the scientists alone to determine how far to carry the applications of their work. Some might even suggest that the *direction* of research, too, should be influenced by open discussion in our society. Though most of us would be reluctant to take such a position, the borderline between the basic science laboratory and the laboratory for product development has become so obscured that even such a radical proposition might one day need to be entertained.

But regardless of the stance taken in such matters, one obvious truth must be acknowledged: when an entire society is to be affected, an entire informed society should participate in the decisions. The society should slow down and give itself time to think, time to confer, time to mature.

The federal government has shown signs of understanding the present dilemma. In 1995, President Clinton formed the National Bioethics Advisory Commission to deal with the kinds of issues raised by the new branches of research. In what may prove to be its most significant decision thus far, this panel—composed of representatives from the fields of medicine, nursing, religion, law, ethics, industry, education, and health advocacy—did in effect decide to keep the child back a grade by supporting the president's planned five-year moratorium on the use of federal funds to attempt human cloning. In its ninety days of deliberation, during which the commission heard testimony from a cross section of informed societal interests, it came down on the side of banning application, while supporting the need for continuing research. Implicit in its recommendations are two guiding and interrelated notions: first, although we have knowledge aplenty, there would be no benefit—even if it were practically possible—in ceasing to pursue even more knowledge; second, knowledge without wisdom is a clear and present danger. The members of the commission did not have to add the lesson of "Law," that wisdom comes only with maturity and maturity comes only with time.

Law, if not "Law," may in fact soon enter the arena. Senators Feinstein of California and Kennedy of Massachusetts—from sea to shining sea—have introduced a bill, S.R. 1611, that for ten years would prohibit attempts to clone a human being, while not restricting other kinds of cloning research, such as that on cells and tissues. The term of the proposed legislation is perhaps longer than even some moderate observers might wish, but events may permit it to be shortened. On the other hand, the term may need an extension once the manifold issues raised by the new science come more clearly into view.

If for no other reason, our society should at least pause briefly to think about its motivations for plunging forward without due consideration of the range of possible consequences or of the immediate financial cost of the research in a time of limited resources. The great advances in the real health of humanity in the past hundred years have occurred more as the result of such preventive measures as immunization, personal cleanliness, water purification, and other public health efforts than from any application—except perhaps antibiotics—of the technologies of cure to individual patients. These preventive measures—and not surgery, pharmacology, molecular biology, or the therapies given in hospitals—are the primary reason for our vastly improved life expectancy. It is health, after all, that should concern us. And it

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should concern us far more than the mere desire to perpetuate ourselves.

Prevention and early diagnosis are more direct routes to health and a good quality of life than any stratagem yet devised, or likely to be devised, in our lifetimes. As long as resources are finite, as they will always be, we would do well not to abandon the wisdom that has stood us in such good stead in the past. The magnificences served up daily by the molecular biologists may exhilarate us, but our real goal should not be the satisfaction of the egocentricity within each of us. To this end, we need to review not only our headlong dash into the arms of the researchers but our priorities as well.

The search for wisdom is always fraught with dangers, but those inherent in the present situation arise from the very fabric of human character. After all, who among us has not occasionally, or more than occasionally, cherished the notion that we might live forever, or that we might stay young far beyond our years, or that we might even continue to exist in some descendant who is, at least genetically, our duplicate? For some, these are more than just notions—they are a prevailing philosophy of life, even an obsession. Maybe this is why, when practical applications are only the glib predictions of overzealous researchers, keen votaries have uncritically hailed the future of genetic studies.

The prevailing mood of our time is self-absorption, and its natural extension, narcissism. Manifestations are everywhere apparent: the youth culture; the huge market in cosmetic surgery; the entire cult of "personal fulfillment"; the so-called human potential movement; the outsize emphasis on the individual as opposed to the cultural group and even the family; the popularity of new drugs to grow new hair or build new erections; and, finally, the very situation I am addressing here—the possibility that research in genetics will put us on the road toward eternal life. In pursuing vanity, far too many of us have simply lost hold of our senses. There has never been a period in human history during which the creed of self-indulgence has found so many apostles.

If there exists a single characteristic that unifies all self-absorption and vanity, it surely must be foolishness. Knowing lots of things does not make us any less foolish. Mere information is only the beginning of knowledge, and even knowledge does not of itself lead to maturity, nor does it guarantee good judgment. We need to grow up a lot more as a society before we are ready to play with the new toys being so efficiently made for us by the precocious scientists. Growing up takes time and reflection. T. S. Eliot reminds us that we have paid a high price for the compulsion to accelerate the engines of our existence:

> Where is the Life we have lost in living?
> Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
> Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

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JOURNAL

Tours of Sicily

PHYLLIS ROSE

May 3. Rome airport. Met our group. Flew on to Palermo.

He wasn't as young as he used to be. His wife had died. He may have been a trifle depressed, although, being British, he didn't say so. "You need a change," said his travel agent in Nîmes, a scholarly man with a psychiatrist's clairvoyance. "And the Sicilian Carousel will give you what you need." Before he knew it, he was in Catania.

Lawrence Durrell, islomane, bard of Corfu, Rhodes, and Cyprus, rode around the greatest Mediterranean island of them all in a little red bus with a higgledy-piggledy assortment of French and British tourists.

Naturally, he didn't think he belonged in a group. Naturally, he hated his groupmates at first glance and felt humiliated by their company. But gradually, as always happens, he sorted them out one from the other, began to appreciate them, and ended by finding them all indispensable. There was Deeds, the admirable Eighth Army veteran, with his military precision, crispness of temperament, and scholarly knowledge of the ancient world; he had been in Sicily many times before. There was Beddoes, sleazy, dirty, cynical, a British schoolmaster on the run from the police for some obscure but unimpressive crime. There was Miss Lobb, a London barmaid, whose chipper heartiness won them all over until they no longer even noticed her vulgarity. There were, as well, an Anglican bishop on the verge of a nervous breakdown, accompanied by his wife; a French couple traveling with a child, speaking no English, fearful, constricted, suspicious (Durrell called them the Microscopes, because he thought that's what they looked like); another French couple, elegant, aristocratic, diplomatic (he called them the Proconsulars); a lovely young German girl and a young German architect, who inevitably became a couple in the course of the tour, to the despair of the young Italian tour guide, Roberto. I count at least twelve of them, not including Roberto and the driver, Mario, and the young Microscope.

Sicilian Carousel, the book Durrell wrote about his circuit of Sicily, takes its title from the tour company's program name. (Everyone tours Sicily in a circle, either clockwise or counterclockwise, from Palermo or Catania, always including Siracusa, Taormina, Agrigento, and sometimes Erice.) It's a novelist's travelogue. The Anglican bishop's wife drops their binoculars into the Fountain of Arethusa, leading to a fight that leads to lovemaking and reconciliation; the sleazy runaway schoolmaster, to evade his pursuers, stages a suicide based on that of the classical philosopher Empedocles, who jumped into the crater of Etna. The underlying narrative is a ghost story, about a woman named Martine, once Durrell's friend, whose invitations to visit her in Sicily he had never accepted when she was alive, and whose letters describing her chosen home serve as his guidebook now that she is dead.

May 4. Palermo. Beautiful city. Much still unrestored from WWII bombing (Mafia misappropriation of funds). Fabulous dinner at home of noble Palermitan family.

In his late thirties, in the year 1786, famous from young manhood as the author of *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, more recently adviser to

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the duke of Weimar, Goethe went to Sicily, keeping a journal and writing long letters that he later incorporated into a book, *Italian Journey*. *Werther* had ended with the self-absorbed hero's suicide, and for much of his life Goethe battled his own inclination to subjectivity, which he saw as unhealthy. This is what had led him to take up a government post in Weimar and also what had led him to take a good look at Sicily. He looked with the eye of an amateur geologist and botanist, as well as that of a poet. Science, like travel, like government service, was another hedge against the self-absorption that led to despair. He would have considered wispy and precious the mere admiration of clouds without taking into account their liquid and electric composition, the appreciation of Greek temples without taking into account the limestone of which they were built.

He also had a lively interest in current events and in people. In Palermo, on somewhat false pretenses, he paid a visit to the family of Cagliostro, a high-flying con man then much in the European news. He was impressed by the piety and gentleness of Cagliostro's aged mother. He wanted to leave her some money to relieve the family's terrible poverty, but upon returning to his inn and doing calculations, he realized he couldn't afford to.

In Palermo, Goethe also saw the festival of Santa Rosalia, the city's patron saint. The streets were so filthy that the thought of parading the saint's image through them horrified him. And what about the viceroy and the nobles who would accompany her? But a providential rain the night before kept the dust down, and much of the muck was swept to the sides of the street. The nobles, said Goethe, walked through the parted garbage as the Israelites had walked through the Red Sea.

Despite the city's filth, Goethe found Palermo a "paradise." He spent a lot of his time there thinking about a play based on the Nausicaa episode of the *Odyssey*. One day, in the Public Gardens, amid the palms and citrus trees of this partly Arab, partly Norman, partly Byzantine city, he tried to imagine what the Primal Plant might look like. Might this be the place where he would find the plant from which all other plants had grown? To his distress, thoughts of the Primal Plant soon drove away all his ideas for the play about Nausicaa. "Why are we moderns so distracted, why do we let ourselves be challenged by problems which we can neither face nor solve!"

He visited a noble family and was shown the prince's coin collection. This was a particular mark of confidence, as occasionally in the past, after showing his collection, the prince had found some pieces missing. The prince's mother also spent time with Goethe and his traveling companion, an artist named Kniep, pointing out items of interest in the palazzo. Goethe thought there was something lonely in the life of these islanders that made them need the refreshment and renewal of chance meetings with sympathetic strangers.

May 6. Erice. Walled medieval city very high up. Glimpse of Trapani and Egadi Islands in distance before fog came in.

Mary Taylor Simeti went to Sicily in 1962, when she was just out of college. She went there to work with Danilo Dolci, the sociologist and reformer who ran a center for community action outside Palermo. She married a Sicilian professor and landowner and stayed in Sicily, raising two children. After twenty years of living there, she wrote a book about her Sicilian life, *On Persephone's Island*, loosely based on the yearly calendar of local holidays. She had a special interest in ancient goddesses, and Sicily is said to be the place where Persephone, picking flowers, "herself a fairer flower," as Milton put it, was dragged down to Hades by Dis, its ruler. All growing things disappeared from the earth while she was gone, and that is why we have winter. Plants blossomed only during the eight months of the year when she was allowed back on earth.

Erice interested Simeti because of its association with Aphrodite. Myth held that the city had been founded by the goddess of love. At the beginning of time, the Titans rebelled against their father, Uranus, and seized control of the universe. They cut off his genitals and threw them into the sea near Trapani. Aphrodite rose from the waves, and, as a monument to her ancestor's sunken parts, she created the nearby mountain of Erice, which rises precipitously, in places almost vertically, from the coastal plains below it. The goddess was worshipped at Erice by the Carthaginians,

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who called her Astarte, then by the Greeks, who built a shrine to Aphrodite Erycina, and then by the Romans, who kept up the shrine. According to some accounts, sailors long at sea, upon making land, headed directly to Aphrodite's shrine to pay their respects. The women of Erice had the reputation of being the most beautiful in Sicily.

Mary Simeti and a friend went to Erice in late April, when the feast of Aphrodite had been celebrated. This is the height of spring in Sicily. As her car, climbing the nausea-inducing hairpin turns that bring you up the mountain, kept switching directions, gorgeous views, first to the north, then to the south, flashed before her eyes as though, she said, a slide projector had gone berserk. At the top, outside the city gate, they parked in a broad piazza and looked out over the sea and down to the plains 2,400 feet below. On a clear day you can see Africa. That day the horizon was obscured by haze, but Simeti could see the uneven coastline, the lagoon of Marsala, the checkerboard fields on the coastal plain, the grid of the Trapani salt pans. "To the west the Egadi Islands float in the haze, the dark humpbacked turtles of Levanzo, Marittimo, and Favignana, and at our feet the city of Trapani stretches the long arms of its breakwaters into the blue."

In the town itself, Simeti and her friend wandered the steep and narrow streets, whose gray cobblestones are arranged in intricate patterns. They enjoyed the stark peasant dwellings as well as the "baby baroque" façades of the old palazzi, and they appreciated how this town keeps its life to itself, in inner courtyards, behind walls, displaying little, unlike the raucous, exhibitionist cities of the plain below. They had dinner at the Re Aceste, eating rigatoni all'Ericina and risotto alla marinara, "subtle and mysterious" food, appropriate for Erice, prepared with pride and restraint. Then they walked to the ruins of the Norman castle, which encloses the supposed site of the shrine of Aphrodite, of which nothing remains.

The castle is another place for spectacular views, but Simeti preferred the close-up, focusing on the wildflowers madly in bloom in every crack and crevice of the ancient stone walls, growing out of thimblefuls of earth. "A square foot of these walls in spring equals an entire field in the richness and the variety of color and texture."

May 7. Segesta. The magnificent temple didn't disappoint. Weather gray and drizzly. Shuttle bus left us at theater just before downpour. Totally drenched.

Before describing the Temple of Segesta, Goethe described the geological composition of the limestone cliffs nearby. Then he counted the columns and assessed the state of preservation of the temple itself. He noted the effect of recent restorations as well as his inability to see certain blocks of stone described by a previous German traveler. Gradually, he snuck up on a description of the most beautifully sited of all Greek temples:

> Standing on an isolated hill at the head of a long, wide valley and surrounded by cliffs, it towers over a vast landscape. The countryside broods in a fertile melancholy. It is cultivated but with scarcely a sign of human habitation. The wind howled around the columns as though they were a forest, and birds of prey wheeled, screaming, above the empty shell.

He made his way up the hill to the other sight at Segesta, the ruins of an ancient theater, invisible from the temple below. But the weather was bad, the climb fatiguing, and the ruins "unimpressive."

In the 1940s, Durrell's military friend Mr. Deeds had approached the temple on muleback. As he later told his companions, "It came to us valley by valley, in little sips, so to speak, appearing and disappearing; each time from a different angle and a different light. At first it was tiny, like a little dice floodlit by the sun. Then it grew. Then at last you arrived with your tongue cleaving to your palate with thirst, but with the feeling of moral grandeur that must come to people who complete an arduous pilgrimage."

When, in the 1970s, Deeds joined the rest of the Sicilian Carousel in another visit to Segesta, he felt, according to Durrell, that "the pleasure of the effort" was lost in arriving at the temple by bus. His reminiscence of how it used to be in the good old days shamed his traveling companions into setting off on foot, uphill, to the theater. The

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unrelenting sun and heat made it a punishing little hike. But the group was in for more. Just as to be close to nature is to be punished by nature, so to be a tourist is to be judged by other tourists. That day Durrell and his group saw an old and aristocratic-looking British couple, sitting beside the path to the theater, lunching elegantly, the woman reading in Greek to her husband, who said, as Durrell and his companions dragged themselves by, "Poor tourist scum." No doubt, said Durrell, they had walked the last hundred miles, sleeping in trees, reading relevant passages from Thucydides and Theocritus to each other!

The Temple of Segesta is unfinished, and the theory has been advanced that it was built merely to fool a delegation of visiting Athenians into thinking the city of Segesta more important and wealthy than it was, so as to lure Athens into an alliance against their neighbor, Selinunte. When the ruse worked, they abandoned the temple. But Mary Taylor Simeti refused to believe "that such base circumstances could ever give birth to the perfection of Segesta, or hasty planning bring about such a felicitous marriage of building to landscape."

She and her companions walked up the agave-lined path to the temple, as one must do now. During the approach, "the temple, perfect from afar, gives up its imperfections: the weathering of centuries of rain and wind upon stone has honed and riddled the columns, carving the vein of limestone into the rough bark of an organic, living creature."

May 8. S. Stefano Quisquina. Watched ricotta being made. Ate it fresh, hot, for breakfast.

Mary Taylor Simeti took her daughter to visit a nearby shepherd's house to buy some fresh ricotta. Every day the shepherd's wife made cheese from the morning's milking of the sheep.

How to make ricotta: Heat the milk in an enormous cauldron over a wood fire, stirring constantly until curds form. Skim these off to be packed and dried as pecorino. After the whey is re-cooked *(ri-cotta),* add more milk. When it curdles, you have ricotta, with a texture like yogurt. Eat the steaming curds and whey from a bowl with fresh bread broken into it. Delicious.

As she stirred the hot milk to keep it from scorching, the shepherd's wife complained to Simeti. It was hard to have to make cheese every day, in summer twice a day, and hard to bring up seven children in the countryside. They had had electric light and running water for only eight years. She had not been brought up to make cheese. Her father was a cooper. Her husband hadn't started out to be a shepherd, either. If he hadn't had to fight in the war, he would have been an accountant. He had learned English in school.

When the ricotta was ready, they left the smoke-filled cooking shed and went to eat at the kitchen table. When she was seated, Simeti was startled to hear a disembodied voice begin to decline a Latin noun. Not knowing how to reply, she said, "Buon giorno." The voice proved to be that of the aged and infirm shepherd, hidden in a bed behind a curtain, who said, "You aren't Sicilian are you, signora? By your accent I would say you were either English or American." He then told Simeti the story of all the adversities to which fate had so unjustly delivered him.

May 9. Agrigento. The Valley of the Temples. The Temple of Juno in ruins. The Temple of Concord intact for 2,400 years. Some olive trees equally old, called "Saracen olives" because they saw the Saracens come and go.

At first, Goethe was frustrated at Agrigento, which he knew as Girgenti. The temples are visible from far away and so spectacular, sited as they are along a ridge which holds them up to the sky, that you want to run to them immediately. The guide kept holding him back, insisting that they wait for the next day, insisting they see the modern city first. Goethe wrote:

> At sunrise we were at last permitted to walk down the hill, and at every step the scenery became more picturesque. In due course we came to the eastern limit of the city where, year after year, the ruins of the temple of Juno fall into ever greater decay because their porous stone is eroded by wind and weather. This temple stands on a foundation of weathered rock. From this point the city wall

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ran due east along the edge of a limestone hill which falls in precipices to the shore plain. The city walls were partly built of quarried stone and partly hewn out of the solid rock. Behind the walls rose the temple. It is easy to imagine what a stupendous sight the rising tiers of Girgenti must have looked from the sea.

Martine, Durrell's dead friend, whose letters serve as his guidebook, had told him that Agrigento would make him understand the Greekness of Sicily. In that extraordinary valley he would find himself suddenly and 100 percent in Greece. He would be able to imagine the primal olive tree making its way out from its home in Athens until it covered the Mediterranean world. And indeed Durrell found the ancient city of Agrigento quite the equal of Athens in beauty and site.

Roberto, the tour guide, insisted the group postpone its approach to the temples in order to view them from a distance and in the sinking of daylight. This way, he said, before the lights of the modern city came on, they could see the ancient city as it had looked in ancient times. That's what he told them. But he held them there longer, until the darkness made the temples invisible, for a moment of modern magic. "Presently there came the swift wingbeats of a church-bell which sounded like a signal and soundlessly the temples sprang to floodlit life all together, as if by miracle."

May 10. Piazza Armerina. The Imperial Villa. Fabulous Roman mosaics preserved by mud slide that destroyed the house. Many rooms, each with different floor designs, keyed to what went on there: women in bikinis with barbells in the women's gym; a fantasy of chariots pulled by birds in the children's room.

Durrell's Grecophile distaste for the Imperial Villa provided some divertingly splenetic moments. Only a moneygrubbing, bureaucratic culture like that of the Romans, he thought, could produce such banality. The mosaics might be historically interesting, but he found them devoid of aesthetic merit. The place looked conceived by the imperial equivalent of an interior decorator, someone with an instinct for the expensively commonplace. Was this really an emperor's pleasure palace or just some vulgar millionaire's hideaway? That would explain everything.

May 11. Siracusa. The extraordinary quarries (called latomie), *once used as prisons, now gardens. Seven thousand Athenians held captive here when the Siracusans defeated a besieging force in 413* B.C.

Durrell quoted his epistolary companion, Martine: "Holes in the ground have always had a depressing effect on me, and the Latomie proved no exception, specially as I wandered about them in the afternoon with a westering sun and lots of dense shadow which gives off waves of humidity." Beautiful, certainly, the gardens were, but Martine had experienced a kind of panic there, the original "panic," she said, when you sense the god Pan sleeping under an olive tree.

Durrell felt it hard not to think the picturesque quarries had been architected, with the monumental grottoes and caverns in the limestone cliff walls, the solitary standing columns and pedestals, the gardens with their "almost Turkish prolixity and richness," every sort of fruit and flower flourishing in the humid air, protected from wind, to produce a paradisiacal luxuriance. But of Pan he felt nothing. Martine, he concluded, had not felt the panic of Pan but of Persephone, the panic of the underground.

What *he* felt most was the melancholy of the passages in Thucydides about the prisoners who were herded and penned there. The ancient historian made it clear that this was no paradise when the rocks were raw and there was no vegetation. It was glaringly hot in the day and damp at night. The men were given a pint of corn and a half-pint of water a day. Unless they could recite a choral ode by Euripides, in which case they were given their freedom, they stayed in the quarries for months, until they were branded and sold into slavery.

May 13. Taormina. Spectacular Greek theater, Mt. Etna in the background.

Reaching Taormina on May 7, 1786, Goethe wrote in his journal, "Thank goodness, everything we saw today has been sufficiently described already."

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• B O O K S •

On the flyleaf of my copy of *Brideshead Revisited*—a small blue Dell paperback, seventy-five cents—is written, in the flowery handwriting I thought elegant at age sixteen, "If I should die, think only this of me: / That there's some corner of a foreign field / That is for ever England." The same inscription appears in my *Penguin Book of English Verse*, in *Jane Eyre*, in the collected poems of Ernest Dowson and of Keats and of Tennyson. Presumably I wrote it in my copy of *Pride and Prejudice*, too, and *Adam Bede*, and the works of Matthew Arnold, though I cannot check, since they all vanished long ago.

But *Brideshead Revisited*, to quote one of its most objectionable characters, *was* England to me—which is to say, nothing so mundane as a rainy island, the center of a vanishing empire, but a condition of heightened romance, the ultimate state of grace. In England, I was sure, people were not only wittier and more charming—that went without saying, any moviegoer knew as much—but gentler, finer, more honorable. They would never speak in loud, shrill voices or force themselves on anyone's attention or tell dirty jokes; their famous politeness was the expression of a genuine delicacy of feeling. They never bragged about their amazing heroism or their invincible decency during World War II. They believed in fair play rather than in competitiveness; they understood that honorable failure was nobler than vulgar success.

REREADING

Revisiting Brideshead

EVELYN TOYNTON

I think I seriously believed that nobody in England ever lied or cheated (the characters in Dickens weren't real, anyway; they were just caricatures, like Popeye). Wickedness and cruelty did not exist among them; their very worst sin, like Mrs. Bennet's in *Pride and Prejudice*, was silliness (which gave rise to English wit). And their moral greatness was conflated, in my mind, with their superior refinement: in all of Berkshire, Hampshire, Gloucestershire, there were no cheerleaders with pompoms, as there were in my suburban high school; no split-level houses with orange wall-to-wall carpet. Loveliness—it was such an English word, conjuring up sheep grazing peacefully on verdant hillsides, blue-and-white Wedgwood, ancient rose-covered cottages of honey-colored stone—was the order of the day.

At the time my fervor was reaching its peak—the mid-sixties—news of another, grittier England had long since arrived in America: the evils of the class system, that feudal leftover that kept a large segment of the population ruthlessly "in its place," had been exposed and attacked by some gentlemen known as the Angry Young Men. They in turn had been superseded, in the public eye, by the working-class Beatles, themselves at least moderately angry (well, John Lennon was) about their country's social hierarchies. London was in the midst of its swinging revolution; liberation was in the air. The rarefied England of my imagination was ceasing to exist even in English novels. It had become irrelevant, a matter for mockery, to the English themselves. Somehow, though, however much I read about the Youthquake and the Mods and the Rockers, my private vision re-

Evelyn Toynton's work has appeared in the *New York Times Book Review*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and other publications.

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mained intact. After all, John Lennon wasn't only angry, he was witty, too, and charming: really quintessentially English in his way.

But *Brideshead Revisited* was on a higher plane altogether, the very highest of planes; it was the apotheosis of Englishness. Nothing could have been further from the crassness of suburban America than Waugh's elegiac tale of an aristocratic Catholic family possessed of such spiritual grace that their titles and estates seem like only the outward symbols of their inner grandeur.

It was impossible to imagine an American Sebastian Flyte—the youngest son of the family, the central presence (one cannot call him the hero exactly) of the first half of *Brideshead*, whose absence haunts the remainder of the book. Sebastian—Lord Sebastian—is blessed with an extraordinary romantic innocence; he is also "magically beautiful, with that epicene quality which in extreme youth sings aloud for love and withers at the first cold wind." At Oxford, he carries a teddy bear named Aloysius, whom he scolds and is scolded by in the most playful, charming, eccentric fashion. Sebastian is in flight (though it's hard to believe that Waugh intended the pun) from, first, his family, and second—the two are inextricably linked in his mind—his religion, whose mysteries are always overwhelmingly present, though he tries to turn his back on them by losing himself in worldly pleasures. (One of his sisters believes that he has a religious vocation he is attempting to escape; certainly, despite his mischievous high spirits, the aura Waugh creates around him is that of a holy man.) As his pious mother increases her inexorable pressure on him—to take on adult responsibilities, to become an observant member of his faith—he retreats further and further into alcoholism. Finally, after many years of mournful exile abroad, he finds refuge as an underporter in a North African monastery, a gentle, melancholy figure with "little eccentricities of devotion, intense personal cults of his own."

The idea of someone too pure to live in the world, too ethereal and delicate to cope with harsh reality, seemed to me like the most exalted poetry. If you had asked me at the time whether the prince of Denmark or Sebastian Flyte was the more tragic figure, I would unhesitatingly have chosen Sebastian.

But there is another kind of romance, too, in *Brideshead*, almost though never quite as poignant. The narrator of the novel, Charles Ryder, whose (asexual) love for Sebastian at Oxford has provided all the major revelations of his youth—"to know and love one other human being is the root of all wisdom"—falls deeply in love, years later, with Sebastian's sister Julia. By this time, Charles, a painter of stately homes, is married to the obnoxious, worldly character who says that he *is* England to her; Julia, whose "Florentine Quattrocento" beauty is uncannily like Sebastian's, is also unhappily married, to a boorish former colonial. The lovers take up residence together at Brideshead, the Flytes' country seat, which, like the family itself, is magically beautiful: "Here, as I passed through those arches and broken pediments to the pillared shade beyond and sat, hour by hour, before the fountain . . . I felt a whole new system of nerves alive within me, as though the water that spurted and bubbled among its stones was indeed a life-giving spring."

Ultimately, however, Charles and Julia, like Charles and Sebastian, are separated by the mystery his "pagan" nature fails to comprehend: the pull of her religion, which years of willful apostasy cannot diminish. Her renunciation of mortal love for the love of God seemed to me the novel's crowning beauty; her impassioned monologue about the wrong she is doing by living with Charles without the Church's benediction was the rapturous high point of its eloquence:

> *Living in sin,* with sin, by sin, for sin, every hour, every day, year in, year out. . . . Mummy carrying my sin with her to church, bowed under it and the black lace veil, in the chapel; slipping out with it in London before the fires were lit; taking it with her through the empty streets. . . . Mummy dying with it, Christ dying with it, nailed hand and foot, hanging over the bed in the night-nursery . . . hanging year after year . . . hanging in the dark church where only the old charwoman raises the dust and one candle burns; hanging at noon, high among the crowds and the soldiers . . . hanging for ever; never the cool sepulchre and the grave clothes spread on the stone slab, never the oil and spices in the dark cave;

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always the midday sun and the dice clicking
for the seamless coat.

If *Brideshead* confirmed and heightened my reverence for all things English, it also made Catholicism itself seem so romantic that during the two years I was under its spell, I constantly fantasized about converting, or even becoming a nun. I did not, however, ask myself whether I believed in the doctrines of the Church; that seemed irrelevant.

For years, the book glowed in my mind, but some instinct warned me against trying to read it again; it was part of the great romance of my youth. In my twenties, I lived in England for long stretches and discovered—partly through the exasperated intercession of my English friends, who felt hono(u)r-bound to point it out to me—that, for all its glories, it was as flawed as any other place. It seemed unnecessary to forfeit any more illusions.

Then, in 1982, Granada produced its ten-hour version of *Brideshead*, which was promptly transferred to American television, and suddenly it became everybody's romance. It was painful to see those characters translated into mere flesh-and-blood people on the television screen. It was an even worse affront that the actor playing Sebastian was athletically stocky, with a pug nose, a blond thatch, and an impish grin. Didn't the people responsible for the production understand anything? Didn't they know that Sebastian, he of the magical, epicene beauty, must be slender and pale, with exquisitely fine features and dark flowing hair?

More disturbing still, somehow, was the way the words that were about to be spoken kept flooding into my head. Most of the dialogue had been faithfully lifted from the book, and line after line came back to me a split second before it was uttered, a form of recovered memory I found so agitating I had to turn off the set. Perhaps it was because the words no longer had the same power over me. It was like meeting someone I'd been in love with years before and finding that all his little mannerisms, the traits that had once seemed so thrilling and precious, now left me unmoved.

Finally, more than a decade later—it had now been thirty years since I first read the book—I was browsing through my bookshelves one evening, looking for something to take on an airplane the next day. I opened it and started reading.

Even the sternest critics of *Brideshead*, such as Edmund Wilson, have acknowledged that the first half, comic and elegiac by turns, is "quite brilliant." (The lament for lost innocence is one of the things the English have always done better than anyone else; from *Paradise Lost* to the "Immortality Ode" to *Peter Pan*, they have given voice to a great national yearning.) The portrait of Sebastian as a God-haunted dreamer is genuinely affecting; the humorous bits, like the war of wits between Charles and his sly, half-batty father, are some of the most brilliant things Waugh ever did, which, since he was a comic genius, is saying a lot. As I read on, I had a huge sense of relief. Though I could not, of course, feel the same intense rapture this time around—that was part of my youthful experience of novels, it would be ridiculous to expect it in my forties—at least I had not been mistaken. It was a wonderful book after all.

But when I arrived at the tale of Charles as an adult, things started to go badly wrong. There is, for example, the problem of the love between Charles and Julia, which is constantly described as perfect. They have never quarreled for a moment; there has never been "a day's coldness or distrust or disappointment." If that weren't enough to make one slightly skeptical, there is Waugh's unfortunate way of dealing with Charles's children, whom his discarded wife—annoyingly enough—feels he ought to see occasionally. Clearly, we are meant to regard this request as another example of the noxious world intruding on the lovers' idyll. Perhaps, too, Charles's fine disdain for his children's feelings is intended as a sign of his innately aristocratic nature, despite his middle-class origins. At times like this, Waugh seems to have a tin ear for ordinary human decency; he is so concerned with ecstatic modes of feeling and high religious obligations that he fails to realize it is in downright bad taste (vulgar in the ultimate sense of the word) to make Charles's indifference to his children a point of pride.

Then there is the increasingly purple prose—Julia's long soliloquy by the fountain, which it is impossible to imagine any human being ever delivering, and the even longer soliloquy by her Byronic father, who has returned

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to England, after twenty years, to die in his ancestral home: "Those were our roots in the waste hollows of Castle Hill, in the brier and nettle; among the tombs in the old church and the chantrey where no clerk sings. . . . We were knights then, barons since Agincourt, the larger honours came with the Georges. . . . Julia's son will be called by the name his fathers bore before the fat days; the days of wool shearing and wide corn lands," etc., etc. Waugh wrote the book in wartime, in 1944. The upper-class England that, as a passionate middle-class snob, he had revered and cherished, was finished. *Brideshead* is his elegy for a vanished world. But I don't think that entirely accounts for the book's sheer unreality, its feverish melodrama.

Nor does it account for its failure as a serious portrayal of religious experience, or—as Waugh himself called it—"an attempt to trace the workings of the divine purpose in a pagan world." Waugh, who had converted to Catholicism fourteen years earlier, presents his religion as wholly a matter of gorgeous rite and mystery. Nowhere is there any real suggestion that it has moral content, that it might have any relationship to human feeling or human conduct. Catholicism, in this view, is simply the Higher Romance, complete with solemn renunciations ("Here in the shadow, in the corner of the stair—a minute to say good-bye") and dramatic deathbed reconciliations.

There is something inherently adolescent—Wilson called it "extravagantly absurd"—about the breed of romanticism found here. The worship of aristocratic glamour, the inability to conceive of a love in which there is any disagreement or strain, even the notion that Sebastian's incapacity to deal with the world is a mark of his spiritual purity: all these are adolescent constructs, which is perhaps why I loved the book so much when I was sixteen. It was an adolescent's vision of love and innocence, even of suffering and redemption. It was uniformly beautiful without being in any sense true.

There is a great scene in *Brideshead*—perhaps the most successful in its second half—in which Anthony Blanche, a decadent aesthete whom Charles knew at Oxford but has not seen for many years, harangues him about his most recent exhibition. Charles has been to Central America to paint ruins in the jungle (it is on the return voyage that he meets Julia again and falls in love with her). Anthony has heard at a society luncheon that his old friend

> had broken away, my dear, gone to the tropics, become a Gauguin, a Rimbaud. You can imagine how my old heart leaped. . . . I wanted to dash out of the house and leap in a taxi and say, "Take me to Charles's unhealthy pictures" . . . and what did I find? I found, my dear, a very naughty and very successful practical joke. It reminded me of dear Sebastian when he liked so much to dress up in false whiskers. It was charm again, my dear, simple, creamy English charm, playing tigers. . . . Charm is the great English blight. It does not exist outside these damp islands. It spots and kills anything it touches. It kills love; it kills art; I very much fear, my dear Charles, it has killed *you*.

Whether or not that is true of England, I think it is true of *Brideshead*. If, on the one hand, Waugh has managed to make alcoholism and snobbery and adultery seem ever so charming, he has also made God seem charming, and love, and art. Though the whole book is a defense of a hierarchical society, he has somehow failed to create a hierarchy within it: all its elements are equally lovely, and therefore equally inconsequential.

Strangely, in his more satirical novels, like *A Handful of Dust*, Waugh's moral vision is much sharper. In *Brideshead*, he seems to have fallen under the spell of his own shimmering, gorgeous creation in much the way I did when, at age sixteen, I made the book my escape from distasteful reality. If, as I. A. Richards said, some people are "swoon readers," then perhaps some books are equally "swoon books," and *Brideshead* is one of them. It's no wonder that one adolescent at least wanted to swoon right into it and never, ever wake up.

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Manual Arts

EDWARD TENNER

THE HAND:
HOW ITS USE SHAPES THE BRAIN, LANGUAGE, AND HUMAN CULTURE
By Frank R. Wilson. Pantheon Books. $30.

The National Zoo in Washington, a unit of the Smithsonian Institution, has a unique public laboratory called the Think Tank. While I lived nearby, I loved to see the zoo's orangutans climb a steel tower in the outer enclosure of the primate house and swing from drooping parallel cables mounted on a series of subsidiary towers that led to the lab building. The strength and grace of these arboreal primates was stunning. Even the youngest moved along fearlessly, assisted by prehensile feet, occasionally pausing on one of the platforms, apparently not to rest but to observe the appreciative crowd.

What happened when the apes reached the laboratory was almost anticlimactic. Scientific experimenters were teaching them to use an abstract language with symbols that, unlike those used in some previous research, had no relationship to the objects signified. A banana might be represented by, say, wavy lines. A set of alternative symbols appeared on a touch-sensitive computer monitor, and the orangutan was supposed to learn to press the appropriate symbol and then confirm the choice by pressing another box on the screen.

I made a mental note that the orangutans' original rain forest habitat clearly had no counterpart to an Enter key. But I also saw a more serious and intriguing problem. The hand that had so effortlessly supported hundreds of pounds was not making the energized jabs I might have expected. It hung almost listlessly, and even when it pressed the correct target, it moved uncertainly. (So much for the old hypothesis that hundreds of monkeys pecking away on hundreds of typewriters would eventually produce the complete works of Shakespeare.) Yet this hand looked not so very different from ours. If I could understand the difference between the orangutan and human hands, I thought, I would know much more about what was uniquely human.

Frank R. Wilson's *The Hand* is the latest interpretation of the hand in the human story. It follows in the tradition of two scientific classics: the surgeon Sir Charles Bell's 1840 book of the same title, and *Hands* (1980, revised 1993) by the late anthropologist and physician John Napier. Like Bell, who saw the hand as evidence of divine creation, Wilson, who is a neurologist specializing in the treatment of performing artists, writes to enlighten as well as to explain. In the relationship of hand to brain he finds the kernel of a new appreciation for the human place in evolution.

The Hand begins with the enigma that had struck me in the zoo: the differentiation of human hands from those of other primates. And here Wilson acknowledges that evidence is elusive. The australopithecine known as Lucy, discovered by Louis and Mary Leakey two decades ago in East Africa, gives us a few important clues. The brachiation now so striking in orangutans and other apes not only made them more agile in the forest but also promoted changes both in the brain and in the capabili-

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ties of the hand. Lucy lacked the human ability to touch the opposite small finger with her thumb; ulnar opposition is a unique feature of the human hand. But her bipedal body already exhibited the features that ultimately made the human being such a devastating predator: the ability to grasp a stone firmly and throw it overhand with the full weight of the body. Following the anthropologist Sherwood Washburn, Wilson argues that the expanding range of the hand's capabilities, including tool use by the era of *Homo habilis* a million years ago, drove the evolution of the brain.

And he goes further. Citing the psychobiologist Harvey Plotkin, Wilson questions whether knowledge can be limited to explicit rules or a mental catalogue. There is also a kind of knowledge that evolution has built into the brain and body as a system, deriving from circumstances that may no longer apply, but persisting to meet new needs. When we fall and spread our arms to protect ourselves—often fracturing them as a result—we are repeating the motion of our tree-dwelling ancestors from a time when falling was a form of locomotion. On the positive side, the capacities of the hand of *Homo sapiens* promoted neural circuitry that went beyond the needs of tool use and extended to language itself. In Robertson Davies's words, "The hand speaks to the brain as surely as the brain speaks to the hand." Indeed, the nondominant hand is not just a less-competent mirror image of the dominant one. Mediated by the brain, they complement each other: "The left hand knows what the right hand is planning and the right hand knows what the left hand just did."

Much of *The Hand* is devoted to what this flesh-and-blood intelligence means to a variety of gifted practitioners. Through his hand, a paddle, and nine to twelve strings, a puppeteer is able to project himself into a marionette so that he can feel its feet on the floor and see through its eyes. A juggler masters his art not by achieving uniform height and timing but, to the contrary, by learning to recover from errors, confirming recent psychological theories that action can be a form of thinking. A builder of prizewinning hot rods exemplifies the social aspect of the hand's use, reflecting the discovery by anthropologists that even in the simplest human societies with the most basic tools, a surprisingly complex cooperative division of labor prevails. Deaf signers show that the hand as an organ of language can express the same (still largely unknown) neural structures that enable human speech. A movement therapist using the Feldenkrais method is able to teach through motion. The skill of a surgeon turns out to be a partnership of the eye and hand: the ability to recognize and manipulate structures that do not always resemble textbook illustrations.

In many of Wilson's case studies, a childhood gift is sustained and nurtured through the indifference and sometimes the antagonism of schools that make a rigid distinction between cognition and physical action. He sees a grave problem in the schools' refusal to recognize that intelligence is an aspect of "the behavior of an entire organism" with its "entire and exclusive history of interactions in the world." Instead of trying to promote only the set of skills that business and government have deemed economically most productive, schools should take account of the unpredictable benefits of human variety. Wilson believes that children's hands have as much intelligence and potential as their minds do, but receive far less nurturing.

Frank Wilson has produced a uniquely challenging book. He has drawn on an exceptional range of studies by psychobiologists, psychologists, linguists, animal behaviorists, neuroscientists, philosophers, and others. Some of his sources, such as the studies of the evolution of the primate hand by the physical anthropologist Mary Marzke, are scientific papers. But many others are complex theoretical works in their own right, and Wilson can give only a brief summary of their views. He also presents a medical account of the structure and function of the hand itself, with its ulnar radiation, intrinsic muscles, pronation and supination, adduction and abduction. All this demands, and repays, careful reading.

Wilson is an engagingly open-minded, pragmatic physician who has, for example, worked with a professional palmist as a consultant and even enrolled in his yearlong training program (which he compares to a medical school radiology class). His eclecticism and zest for varied

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experience make him an ideal critic of the zealots of computer modeling, whether in medical practice or in education, who seem to believe that all problems can be solved and all human capacities realized (and measured) on a seventeen-inch monitor. He also rightly deplores the erosion of tinkering by symbolic manipulation. Against these trends he convincingly asserts the unity of physical and mental experience.

His argument rings true. A research scientist I know recently returned to competitive chess. Like most masters, he uses advanced PC programs and CD-ROM databases, but before entering a correspondence tournament, he bought the best traditional Staunton set he could find. Beautiful, weighted chessmen appear to add no new information to what is visible on a monitor, but to my friend and his peers, hand contact with the pieces is essential to a winning analysis. Purely visual representation fails to tap into the mind's full abilities.

The book's great strengths are inextricably entwined with its potential problems. One is imperfect integration. *The Hand* is three books in one: a scientific and philosophical exposition, a series of character sketches, and a pedagogical program. These sections do not always reinforce each other. Wilson's long quotations from his subjects are sometimes enlightening in their own right—I especially appreciated the story of the Feldenkrais practitioner—but can be marginally relevant. A chapter on a chef literally gets out of hand and becomes a tribute more to gastronomic entrepreneurship than to culinary skill. Even at their best, these case studies can paradoxically make it more difficult to return to the harder science. And in one of Wilson's pedagogical sections, there is a long history of the workshop-classroom in Europe, North America, and Japan. What happened to those teaching methods? Wilson would have been better advised to write a separate book on hands, minds, and schools.

Wilson's examples tend to be people who pursue strong childhood inclinations that were temporarily ignored or frustrated. He tells us surprisingly little about mature people who discover new abilities. Is this exclusion caused by the nature of human development, or will a future generation see it as another twentieth-century received opinion? Wilson criticizes Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences as a pluralistic restatement of elitism, but he also seems to believe—on the basis of a handful of cases—that children have vocational essences, not just multiple potentials. Noting that there is a higher incidence of accidents among carpenters than among roofers, he suggests that danger filters out from roofing all but those candidates who can handle its exceptional perils: surefooted lads who can hang by their thumbs. It seems more likely that the hazards of roofing are more constantly evident, while those of carpentry are easier to ignore. Similarly, seven times as many motorists as pedestrians (mainly road workers) may indeed die at highway construction sites, but that does not mean that flagmen and paving crews are exceptionally alert and agile by birth, only that they recognize and learn to deal with danger in a way that falsely secure drivers do not.

Finally, there are two curious omissions. One is disability. Eloquent as Wilson is on the sign language of the deaf, he curiously pays little attention to the mental and physical development of people who have lost the use of their hands, or who were born without functional hands. I should have thought the study of prostheses and other hand substitutes might validate rather than challenge Wilson's ideas of the complementarity of motion and cognition. He relegates to a footnote the fact that people have been able to "transfer . . . manual fluency to their feet and think nothing of it." Even more surprisingly, he makes no reference to the American paleontologist Geerat Vermeij. Blind since youth, Vermeij has been able to turn tactile data into brilliant science with his mind's eye. Even as a student, he was showing his professors that bird specimens appearing almost identical to most observers, for example, had significantly different beaks and feathers. Skilled touch revealed features obscured by sight. It's strange that the author apparently never mentions Vermeij's insightful book: its title is *Privileged Hands.*

And—for a physician who is also a professional author—Wilson attaches scant importance to the physical side of writing. He mentions that he has treated patients with writer's

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cramp, but these are presumably musicians. It would have been interesting to hear, for instance, about the nineteenth-century epidemic of writer's cramp among English clerks, which raised the same concerns as carpal tunnel syndrome has more recently. Wilson describes handwriting as rows of connected circles slightly modified to produce meaning. This may be true of English and certainly applies, for example, to the old German *Sütterlinschrift* with which I once struggled in German archives. It was such a uniform, slightly modulated squiggle that recognition of word shapes and whole phrases became essential. But what of Japanese and Chinese scrolls, of Arabic texts, of pre-Columbian and ancient Near Eastern inscriptions? And what of the subtleties of the thin and thick strokes of the "fine Italian hand"? Surely a modern European or North American handwritten manuscript reveals subtle information about the author's personality that would be lost in an electronic text file. Wilson might have found extensive evidence of the sensory side of writing. If palmists have insights, what about graphologists?

None of this resolves the puzzle of how and when we diverged from the other higher primates. I am thinking again of the Think Tank orangutan's drooping forefinger against the computer screen. It is as if the orangutan comprehended that humanity had (at least for the moment) chosen to cast its lot with these glowing boxes. I have often heard it said that children playing outside have become an uncommon sight: they are all inside at the computer. Bicycle manufacturers also point to the PC as a likely reason for a sales slump that began in the early 1990s. Meanwhile, the computer industry is promoting voice recognition and voice command. Wilson sees the real possibility that future generations will be radically changed by electronically mediated experience, which will have "replaced haptics with vision as the primary arbiter of reality and . . . substituted virtual baseball for the old-fashioned kind at an age when the brain's sensorimotor system hasn't settled on the time constants it will use for its own perceptual-motor operations." If so, the human hand's fading hegemony has found a worthy valedictorian.

A Partnership of Geniuses?

Fortune Is a River: Leonardo da Vinci and Niccolo Machiavelli's Magnificent Dream to Change the Course of Florentine History

By Roger D. Masters. The Free Press. $24.

Reviewed by **PAUL ROAZEN**

Although there is a risk that I will sound like an old codger, it seems to me that the subject of political theory has fallen on hard times. I was therefore greatly heartened to read Roger Masters's lively new book on a curious (and doomed) project in Renaissance Italy.

Forty or fifty years ago, political philosophy was indisputably the most prestigious part of political science, the only area with established standards of academic excellence; the rest of the field was tainted by its association with current events, and international relations was considered the bottom of the barrel. Every academic department prided itself on the stature of its political theorists—no halfway decent department could be without at least one or two.

Today, alas, political science has come in line with the proposal to become, shortsightedly, more relevant. Policy issues now seem to take precedence in America over intellectual history, although the traditional pursuit of political philosophy is still undertaken in Britain and on the continent. Here, however, the study of constitutional law has by and large been handed over to law schools. It was once a required aspect of the field for undergraduate political science majors. The old notion of ivory tower scholars pursuing the history of ideas has pretty much disappeared. To compound the problem further, ideological sectarianism has afflicted the ranks of those who pursue the study of political theory. A variety of different sects have had turf battles over the shrinking pie allotted to political theory. The

Paul Roazen's most recent book is *Canada's King: An Essay in Political Psychology.*

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conservative followers of Leo Strauss have continued to promote his teachings, methodological as well as substantive. The liberal contingent has been apt to be attracted by what departments of philosophy happen to be interested in, which means that the history of thought itself—and the study of the social base of political philosophizing—has taken a back seat. The upshot has been that while college students may be as interested as ever in political theory, departments seem able to get away with sponsoring fewer theorists. The center of the discipline has correspondingly shifted away from history to concerns that are at least apparently more practical.

It is in this context that this new book by Roger Masters, a professor of government at Dartmouth College and the author of *The Nature of Politics,* comes as a distinct and welcome surprise.

A few early passages in *Fortune Is a River* touch on the Renaissance obsession with secrecy. In the early sixteenth century, heresy was still a dangerous crime, and Machiavelli was once arrested and tortured for allegedly having conspired against the Medici in Florence. The importance of secret intentions in the thought of political theorists has long been a contention on the part of Strauss and his disciples, and I suppose Masters belongs to that camp. But while the attractions of Strauss's teachings have largely escaped me, I must say that the appeal of Masters's is far from being hermetically scholastic. *Fortune Is a River* has been adopted by the Book-of-the-Month Club, the History Book Club, and the Quality Paperback Book Club, so it is not speculative to say that it will have a wide readership. While I think some of its central contentions are questionable, there is no doubt that Masters writes with vigor and is intent on reaching beyond an academic audience.

The book's thesis concerns a new link that Masters has hypothesized between Machiavelli and Leonardo da Vinci. The traditional Machiavelli literature ignores his possible relationship with Leonardo, although it seems that art historians have known something about the interactions between the politician and the artist. In any event, despite the absence of conventional documentation, Masters explores an effort on the part of the Florentines between 1503 and 1506 to divert the Arno River in order to turn Florence into a seaport and cause the rival city of Pisa to lose its water supply. Interestingly, Masters points out that the background to Leonardo's *Mona Lisa,* painted during the period of the Arno project, contains not only a river but also a fort outside Pisa.

Even today, almost five centuries after the rivalry between the two cities that inspired the plan, Florentine children are raised to believe that the Pisans are a good deal less than human. The rivalry must have been often on Machiavelli's mind during his years as a high civil servant in the Florentine government. Italian unification is relatively recent, and the ancient conflicts between cities and regions are still very much a fact of contemporary political life. But today's Florentine enmity toward Pisa is only a pale reflection of the hostile sentiments active at the beginning of the sixteenth century.

The title of the book comes from one of the immortal images in Machiavelli's *The Prince,* which turns on how fortune can be a river, either rampaging or (possibly) tamed. Masters makes it abundantly clear how the taming of the Arno might have increased the fortunes of Florence. Reports of the first voyage of Columbus had been published in Florence in 1493, but a consensus did not emerge until around 1500 that he had in fact found a new continent rather than the Asian mainland. The commercial possibilities that would flow from Florence's transformation into a seaport were not lost on the city's merchants, who strongly supported the Arno project.

Masters calls the tie between Machiavelli and Leonardo a "mysterious friendship," when in fact there is no compelling reason to think that they were friends at all. Masters argues that they "probably first met" in 1501, when their paths crossed at Cesare Borgia's court. Later that same year they were both in Florence, working on the project to divert the Arno. The idea of the project was not new to Leonardo; ten years earlier he had expressed the hope of making the Arno a navigable waterway and irrigating the Arno Valley in the process. Machiavelli's interests were in Florentine military and foreign policy. In that context, Leonardo's peaceful plan would have been seen as another way of winning the war against

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Pisa, a conflict that had long been a matter of intense frustration to the Florentines.

Among the pieces of evidence Masters marshals to support the presumed friendship between Leonardo and Machiavelli is a commission Florence gave Leonardo in 1503 to paint a huge fresco. One of Machiavelli's assistants described the battle scene to be painted, and it has also been found in Leonardo's notebooks. This same assistant helped Leonardo in a Florentine legal claim over an inheritance. Masters surmises that the assistant worked for both Leonardo and Machiavelli because the men were well acquainted.

Leonardo never completed the fresco, since his experimental formula for the paint proved unreliable. What Masters describes as "the magnificent dream to change the course of Florentine history" came to a sad end, too, after the ditches excavated to divert the river collapsed—the result of both engineering incompetence and genuine misfortune. The project was finally abandoned, although there was lingering unpleasantness about how much money had been wasted. Masters thinks that these setbacks can "probably" explain why neither Machiavelli nor Leonardo wrote of their work together. Since their judgment and competence were called into question by the results of their collaboration on the river project, he suspects that after it was over, neither man was eager to call attention to a failure.

Masters's evidence for a true collaboration between Leonardo and Machiavelli is at best fragmentary, but I think that the specifics of his thesis are less important than his book's general cultural impact. Whether or not the men ever collaborated, *Fortune Is a River* provides a useful vehicle for learning about their parallel careers. Those familiar with Machiavelli's life and labors are unlikely to be at home with Leonardo's life story, and art historians cannot be expected to be knowledgeable about the ins and outs of Machiavelli's political fortunes. Although Leonardo, who contributed at least as much to science and technology as to art, went on to a flourishing worldly career, Machiavelli did not; but the writings that ensured Machiavelli's enduring reputation were made possible by the rustic leisure forced on him after he fell from his position of power.

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Undeterred by the tendency of most contemporary political theorists to address themselves primarily to their colleagues, Masters has revived the older tradition of political philosophers who take it as their responsibility to address the general public, demonstrating the continuing relevance of their discipline. This approach does, of course, have its dangers. I worry that Masters may have gone too far in treating Leonardo and Machiavelli as our contemporaries, thereby making anachronistic assumptions about the past and failing in the historian's central task of showing us a world unlike our own. However, Masters has performed a great service by reanimating the pursuit of intellectual history, thereby reminding us how central the study and application of political theory is to our understanding of the past and, by implication, of our own times.

The Pursuit of the Possible

CHILDREN OF SILENCE
By Michael Wood. Columbia University Press.
$22.95.

Reviewed by KURT JENSEN

When the inevitable conversation about the usefulness of art arises—often around the time the NEA awards its grants—the contestants routinely hunker down into their opposed positions: instrumentalists versus aesthetes. On the one hand, there are those who embrace a thoroughgoing practicality, seeing art as a rehabilitative dose intended to heal what is wayward in us, and on the other hand, those who assert that art and life are different animals, whose breeding can produce only unremarkable art, bad politics, and sham history. Michael Wood, a professor of English at Princeton University and the author of *The Magician's Doubts*, a remarkable study of Nabokov, is too smart and too sporting to opt for this silliness, and instead revives the literary dimension of this vital argument by reclassifying the roles of both reader and writer in what is, essentially, a contest of imaginations. He does not present this as a proposal: *Children of Silence* is a rigorous, inviting study of fourteen contemporary writers of both criticism and fiction (ranging from Roland Barthes to Stephen King, and including Samuel Beckett, Angela Carter, and Edward Said). The book is an intellectually limber fulfillment of Said's proposition "What is critical consciousness, at bottom, if not an unstoppable predilection for alternatives?"

Our reading and writing, Wood asserts, cannot proceed unmauled by history, and his main ambition here is to open up our older, more conventional notion of reading—a "passive, tame, quiet, sheltered activity"—to broader imaginative ambitions, with reading serving as "writing's partner, a much fuller partner than it used to seem." He argues that a detectable silence has seeped into the contemporary writing he surveys here, a silence that is partly a product of dream-fed imaginations in collision with their circumstances. "The history of pain," he writes, "becomes the history of silence—of many silences." The unsayable becomes, in effect, an absence that subtly warps the shape and content of the writing such imaginations produce, much as a black hole warps light. *Children of Silence* is a study of narrative art—fiction and criticism both—whose impossible ambition is to *contest* silence, to swamp it with words and saturate its void with meanings.

The essays on the writers he has gathered here intend not to prescribe but to demonstrate examples of the kinds of reading he has in mind. His amiable idea of criticism is that of "the attempt to start a conversation . . . with people who have read some of the same books you have, have read books like the ones you like to talk about, and have read lots of books you haven't read."

At heart, the intention of this broad survey seems to be to find, and explicate, three ideas that serve as symptoms of the silence of his title: "The persistence of the idea of paradise . . . [t]he notion that silence is what literature longs for but can't reach . . . [and] the

Kurt Jensen reviews contemporary fiction for various publications, including the *Boston Globe* and the *Los Angeles Times*.

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sense that fiction is a form of criticism, and that criticism can be fiction." Together, these ideas state the fact of, the reasons for, and the consequences of Wood's central thesis. They also provide the book's organizing principle. Thus, the opening section (on Barthes, Beckett, Julio Cortazar, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, and Italo Calvino) explores various conceptions of silence; the second group of essays (on Gabriel García Marquez, Toni Morrison, Angela Carter, and Stephen King) explores the yearnings that prompt it; and the third (on Edward Said, Kazuo Ishiguro, and Jeanette Winterson) illustrates the variety of adaptations both criticism and fiction have evolved in response.

Wood's graceful style, incisive observations, and deft aphorisms seem to constitute less an urgent and pointed argument than a persuasive arrangement of ideas. His recurring tonic might be called Possibility. Angela Carter's work "sketches out an idea of the possible . . . and incites us to compare it with our own most cherished ideas about reality." Stephen King "reminds us through fantasy how fantastic the unimagined world can be." Jeanette Winterson "uses something like a ruse of narrative to ask questions about the way time is imagined, and the consequences of these strategies for our ideas of the possible."

While it may seem that we are caught between a burdensome history and a problematic present, imaginative writers suggest that, after all, there may be something promising at work. The present—"the real," "the actual"—does not in fact shape us as much as we shape it, viewing it from a particular, perhaps imagined, vantage. Our lives, while surely subject to history, are just as surely equipped to reject the totality of its consequence.

Wood's attention then turns to the promise of silence, a promise based on the incompleteness of our fictional critical accounts of the human situation. This incompleteness implies mutability: there is room left for us to create (and construe) anew. The counsel offered by many of Wood's writers, like his counsel to readers, appeals to the speculative imagination, and can be summed up in the poet James Dickey's suspicion that "in creating the world, God did not exhaust all the possibilities." If Wood persuasively evokes the intractability of the silence at the heart of life, he also enhances our appreciation of its uses. It provokes, for instance, the speculative imaginations of the authors he considers; the employment of imagination is commensurate with freedom. "Literature," Wood writes, "is a form of freedom, not because it deals with the imaginary, but because it reconstructs the real in the mind, which is a protectable playground," a place provisionally exempt from the ravishments of politics and history.

This is not an expression of critical doctrine; at best, it might be called Interpretive Pragmatism. But in the strict attention Wood pays to the practices of reading and writing, the effect of his work is bracingly (William) Jamesian. Like James, Wood refreshes critical activity by restoring to it the disregarded vitality he sees in the practical negotiations conducted among words when we read, and when writers write. Yet there is a strange and elegiac quality to the story he tells here. While Wood's unflaggingly perceptive, unfailingly generous, and eminently clear essays serve to resuscitate unexpected opportunities for both reading and writing, there is, in the shadow of his relentless advocacy of possibility, a sense of regret. Our lives, after all, are distinguished by the daily extinction of possibilities: stepping left dooms our hope of stepping right. Yet we step, and step again, and read of other worlds, and reassert the necessity of imagining them, and Wood promises that it is far more important to know that they are possible than to know that they may never come to be.

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"A Most Alive Person"

BADGE OF COURAGE:
THE LIFE OF STEPHEN CRANE
By Linda H. Davis. Houghton Mifflin. $35.

Reviewed by JAMES HYNES

Most readers, I suspect, know only two things for certain about Stephen Crane. The first is that he wrote one of the great war novels in American literature, *The Red Badge of Courage,* before he ever saw a real battle. The second is that he died tragically young. Some may recall "The Open Boat," his harrowing true story of shipwreck and survival off the Florida coast, or *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets,* his equally harrowing novella about a slum girl's descent into prostitution. Readers familiar with the history of literary klatches may know that at the end of his life, Crane was part of a circle in England that included several rather more accomplished writers—Joseph Conrad, Henry James, H. G. Wells, Ford Madox Hueffer (who had not yet changed his name to Ford). Beyond that, Crane's life and work are pretty dim for most of us.

We owe this state of affairs in large part to the fact that Stephen Crane is one of those authors most of us read when we are young and, truth to tell, tend not to reread when we are older. When this brisk and authoritative biography of Crane came to me, I hadn't read *The Red Badge of Courage* in thirty years, since I was thirteen—but I immediately sought it out again. Linda H. Davis, the author of a biography of *New Yorker* editor Katharine S. White, thus gives us not only a complete and engaging account of Crane's brief life, but also a compelling invitation to reread his work.

By placing Crane's writing in the context of his times, and in the light of his short and intense life, Davis makes what might otherwise seem an astonishing, even freakish precocity come across instead as the passion and ambition of youth. As the first biographer to work with Crane's correspondence, she paints a portrait of an often desperately energetic young man.

Born in 1871, the last of a Methodist minister's fourteen children, Crane dropped out of college after two years and threw himself, sink or swim, into the life of the freelance journalist. *Maggie,* his first large-scale fiction, caught the attention of Hamlin Garland and William Dean Howells, and his next major work, *The Red Badge of Courage,* was an international success. Having gone overnight from penniless hack journalist to literary celebrity, Crane watched the rest of his brief life play out as a sort of gaudy melodrama, a series of variations on the theme of the candle burned at both ends. Pulled in all directions by his celebrity status, his ambition, and his youth, Crane struggled with scandal; with several passionate, and overlapping, romantic attachments; with malicious rumors that he was a drug addict and a Satanist; and, always, with money. He came to regard *The Red Badge of Courage* as a curse that dogged him wherever he went. In particular, it followed him in his career as a celebrity war correspondent in Cuba and Greece, and in the end, his need to prove that he could face in real life the danger he had written about in his great novel hastened his death, at the age of twenty-eight, from tuberculosis complicated by the malaria he had caught in Cuba.

Davis is not entirely persuasive when she argues that Crane's lifelong ill health actually spurred him to take risks that a healthier man might not have; many perfectly healthy young men have been known to take the same sorts of foolish chances that Crane did. She is convincing, however, in showing how Crane's rage for experience, whatever the reason, resulted in the economical intensity of his best prose:

> The eyes . . . had changed to the dull hue seen on the side of a dead fish. The mouth was open. Its red hue had changed to an appalling yellow. Over the grey skin of the face ran little ants. One was trundling some sort of bundle along the upper lip.

This, of course, is one of the most famous passages in *The Red Badge of Courage:* Crane's

James Hynes is the author of a book of novellas, *Publish and Perish: Three Tales of Tenure and Terror,* as well as a novel, *The Wild Colonial Boy.*

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description of the corpse young Henry Fleming stumbles upon in the woods after running from his first battle. The scene in which Henry turns tail is one of the most ruthlessly honest in all of American literature, and it is even more remarkable when one remembers that it was imagined by a twenty-three-year-old who had never seen anything more violent than street fights in Hell's Kitchen. Crane's novel is startlingly modern—psychological, graphic, highly visual—with an intensity similar to that of the work of the World War I poets.

Davis vividly evokes the image of Crane researching the book in the New York studio of artist Corwin Knapp Linson, "squatting on the floor, Indian-style, beside the bookcase. Finally he tossed a magazine aside, and got to his feet. 'I wonder that some of those fellows don't tell how they felt in those scraps!' he said. 'They spout eternally of what they did, but they are as emotionless as rocks!'" Crane was obviously determined to do things differently.

Apart from *Maggie,* Crane's other fiction doesn't quite match the achievement of his best-known novel, at least to this reader. Unlike *The Red Badge of Courage,* some of his short stories come across as dated: anecdotal tales of colorful characters in exotic locales, often with a twist at the end. "The Blue Hotel," a story of gambling and murder in a snowbound hotel on the remote Great Plains, reads like Maupassant, and "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," with its raving gunslinger and O. Henry-like ending, has a hint of cruelty reminiscent of Balzac. They stand in an honorable and highly entertaining tradition of short fiction—Kipling, Stevenson, Wells, and even Henry James, in his supernatural tales, come to mind—but they represent a genre long since swept away by the kind of subtle, epiphanic, highly interior work originated by Chekhov and Joyce. As good as Crane's stories are, they're at a dead end, at least as far as literary fiction is concerted. In some respects, Crane is the James Dean of American literature—intense young artist fashions a handful of brilliant performances and then dies—and is thus susceptible to the same sort of goofy parlor game: What If He Had Lived? Just as there's a nasty thrill in imagining James Dean showing up paunchy and middle-aged on episodes of *The Love Boat,* it's possible to imagine a cranky

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Stephen Crane, aging boy wonder, trekking off to cover the increasingly savage wars of the twentieth century, still trying to live up to, or live down, *The Red Badge of Courage.* Having already written the definitive war story of his generation, Crane didn't see real combat until he was a war correspondent in Greece, where a few of the more experienced correspondents hinted that he spent a lot of time behind the lines. Later on, in Cuba, he seemed to be trying to prove them wrong, striding erect along San Juan Hill in a long white coat and blithely ignoring the sniper fire he drew. Davis makes it clear that the increasingly frenetic and unreliable behavior of his last few years came from the tensions caused by his dual needs to prove that he was more than just *The Red Badge* and to race the clock of his own declining health.

Davis herself, in a final summing up, argues that Crane's legacy is greater than just *The Red Badge of Courage:* "Few writers could have matched any of Crane's short works—'The Blue Hotel,' 'The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky,' 'The Open Boat,' 'The Upturned Face,' *The Monster*—even in the course of a long career." It may be unfair to compare, but it's hard to put these stories up against, say, Chekhov's "The Kiss" and find in favor of Crane. As much as he came to hate it, *The Red Badge of Courage* remains Stephen Crane's masterpiece.

You need not agree with Davis's assessment of Crane's shorter fiction, though, to be moved to tears by her account of his long, slow death. Her description of a last visit by his English friends, just before a futile attempt at a cure in Germany, is heartbreaking, One after the other, Wells, Hueffer, and Conrad came to say farewell, knowing they would never see him again. In the end, though, Davis wisely lets one of Crane's American friends, "a slight acquaintance named E. R. Woodruff," send him off:

> I didn't know him well but as I think of him I remember him as always standing by watching and measuring people and such. Even in the thick of things he seemed a man apart, a slight boyish figure with a mop of light hair and shining eyes which saw everything. A most alive person, so alive that the news of his death seemed like a mistake.

The Uses of the Past

THINKING WITH HISTORY: EXPLORATIONS IN THE PASSAGE TO MODERNISM
By Carl E. Schorske. Princeton University Press. $24.95.

Reviewed by JONATHAN ELUKIN

How can one do justice to essays that range through the medieval imagery in Disraeli's novels, the architectural and social history of Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum, Burckhardt's analysis of the Renaissance, and Freud's obsession with Egypt? This new collection shows why Schorske, the eminent intellectual historian whose *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna* remains a classic, is a master craftsman. Whether tracing the evolution of Mahler's music, exploring the affinities between Richard Wagner and William Morris, dissecting the reasons why late-nineteenth-century Viennese culture turned away from history, or meditating on "the city" as seen by European intellectuals, Schorske never loses sight of the larger theme that animates the volume: how the nineteenth century came to terms with modernity by "marshaling the resources of the past." These essays, which bring to life some highly specialized aspects of cultural history, also serve to escort us into a great treasure house in which Schorske can confront the larger issue of the authority of the past.

Before we enter the vault, Schorske carefully provides us with the tools we will need to appreciate its riches:

> Thinking *with* history implies the employment of the materials of the past and the configurations in which we organize and comprehend them to orient ourselves in the living present. In one mode, we think with the substantive yield of historical inquiry, with the images we form of the past, in order to define ourselves by difference or by

Jonathan Elukin, a historian and critic, frequently reviews books for THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR.

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> resemblance to it. . . . We can also "think with history" in another mode, when we conceive of history as a process. Then history is dynamic, linking or dissolving static elements in a narrative pattern of change. . . . If we locate ourselves in history's stream, we can begin to look at ourselves and our mental life, whether personal or collective, as conditioned by the historical present as it defines itself out of—or against—the past.

Such sensitivity to history, according to Schorske, has not survived the high culture of the twentieth century:

> Modern architecture, modern music, modern science—all these have defined themselves not so much out of the past, indeed scarcely against the past, but detached from it in a new autonomous cultural space. The modern mind grew indifferent to history, for history, conceived as a continuous nourishing tradition, became useless to its projects.

Despite this bold characterization of twentieth-century culture, Schorske's essays focus primarily on the more historically minded culture of nineteenth-century Europe. It is only in the essays on the movement toward modernism in Vienna, and particularly in the long pieces entitled "Grace and the Word: Austria's Two Cultures and Their Modern Fate" and "Generational Tension and Cultural Change," that Schorske fulfills the promise of his subtitle. Here he delineates a slow movement away from traditional forms in art, music, and theater and toward a more subjective, internalized, and psychologized search for truth and beauty. The essays on Mahler and Freud, which are included in the final group of essays ("Clio Eclipsed"), are simply dazzling, but as the book's conclusion they seem slightly out of place. Both figures, but in particular Freud, retain a lingering historicism that puts them at odds with the movement away from history that Schorske has just described. Schorske's analysis of Freud's last major work, *Moses and*

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Monotheism, suggests the inescapable attraction that history exerted on Freud even as he tried to free human and Jewish experience from history. The promise of the volume's subtitle—to follow the "passages to modernism"—is thus more suggestive than fully descriptive.

As with all of Schorske's work, however, even the lacunae are provocative and rewarding. By giving us a secure outpost in the nineteenth century, Schorske allows us to venture forth a little into the twentieth century to see if the historical landscape around us is really as desolate as we fear. Certainly, if we consider music and the visual arts—the primary area of Schorske's own study of the nineteenth century—the twentieth century has turned away from overt historicism and continued on the path of introspection and timelessness. In other areas of culture, however, historicism is still with us, albeit in a rather ragged and sometimes bastardized state.

History remains a crucial battlefield, for example, in the struggle over national identity and the viability of national histories. The participants in the recent *Historikerstreit* fought out issues of German legitimacy, continuity, and responsibility. They were struggling not only to understand the past, but to determine the shape of contemporary German identity. The controversy over Vichy's treatment of the Jews and the ongoing investigation of Swiss relations with Germany, as well as the history of other neutral countries in World War II, are further examples of how societies must be drawn back to the past before they can move forward.

In the United States, history is still serving as the battleground of national identity, as boards of education, publishers, and scholars struggle to define what kind of history—and thus what kind of identity—is taught in our schools. The debate over national history standards is an attempt to grapple with the question of what kind of society we live in now. The great drive to open up history to multicultural themes is the result of pressures by traditionally excluded groups to claim historical validation.

If we move beyond the boundaries of expressly national and political disputes to the wider territory of popular culture, the terrain is even more crowded with historical landmarks. Some examples of this historical thinking may be ephemeral or even deceptive, but it is undeniable that there is an insistent public thirst for some kind of contact with the past, as evidenced by the existence of cable channels exclusively devoted to history, the adaptations of Jane Austen and George Eliot novels for the large or small screen, and the Hollywood films that trumpet their devotion to accuracy in depicting slavery, combat, or political conspiracies. In addition to these mainstream evocations of the past, historical reenactors of colonial and Civil War battles, and even Disney-like historical theme parks, fill out a horizon that might at first glance appear barren of historical thinking. To these we can add a contemporary enthusiasm for historical novels that rivals the nineteenth century's embrace of Scott. Serious novelists, as well as popular writers of romances and mysteries, are increasingly setting their work in the past. One thinks here most recently of DeLillo's *Underworld* and Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon.* These books and films, both fictional and documentary, are not works of historical scholarship, and there are risks in seeing them as offering authoritative interpretations of history, but whatever their faults, they do signal the desire to vivify the past and to work out contemporary social concerns against the backdrop of history.

Looking back on this variegated historical landscape, we are fortunate to have Schorske as a guide. He has taught us which questions to ask and demonstrated that they are as valid for the twentieth century as for the nineteenth. Does an affinity for history help us come to terms with our own process of modernization and social change, or is it simply a patina of escapist nostalgia without deeper meaning—or even a vehicle of potentially reactionary thinking? Is there any real sense of the authority of the past as a controlling force in our lives, or is that inclination limited to adherents of religious or nationalist enthusiasms who are already seen as out of step with a more skeptical modernism? Can a search for truth and beauty sustain itself if it is deracinated from historical forms?

It is asking too much of any book, perhaps, to answer all of these questions. Schorske gives us so much that we instinctively ask more of him. By his amazingly erudite and finely chiseled portraits of the potentialities of nineteenth-century culture, he has prepared the way for us to assess how we think with history in our own day.

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THE READER REPLIES

THE SUMMER ISSUE

The new AMERICAN SCHOLAR is a palimpsest of the old, casting a different shadow of concern. I say to its readers: hold out and you will be happily surprised. This second issue under a new editorial pen demonstrates this steadfastness. Nothing has been lost and everything has been gained. It is still the very best!

ROY D. SCHICKEDANZ
Glenwood, Illinois

How sad that THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR has been "snatched." The SCHOLAR, when it was a human production, fascinated by its literacy and wide-ranging interest. The aliens who have snatched it seem to come from a species of extraterrestrial narcissists who have not quite mastered English, human thought patterns, or the design of magazine covers.

JOHN R. SCHOTTLAND, M.D.
Meridian, Mississippi

I've just subscribed to THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, having come across a copy of the summer issue in, of all places, one of the mega-bookstores that have opened up here in Canada. I was startled and delighted to find how easily and elegantly essays on the humanities and sciences cohabit the pages of your journal. C. P. Snow be damned! Sincere congratulations.

WAYNE DANIELS
Toronto, Canada

Great issue!

MARY NABORS
Duncanville, Texas

My verdict is one of disappointment. Get better articles with less multiculturalism and more oomph for the general, albeit scholarly, reader.

MARTIN L. BELLER, M.D.
Gaines, Pennsylvania

As one who admired Joseph Epstein, I propose it is past time to acknowledge that his grand run is over. It seems to me important, too, to extend to his successor, who brings eye-popping credentials to the position, not a grudging welcome but a sincerely felt presumption of success. THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR will be different with Anne Fadiman as editor, but that doesn't mean less enjoyable or edifying. Indeed, her first issues promise high standards as well as much enjoyment.

JOEL P. SMITH
Madison, Wisconsin

THE UNFUZZY LAMB

What a wonderful treat Philonoë's essay on Lamb is! I am a confirmed Elian (are there any unconfirmed Elians?) and am delighted to encounter another. For me, Lamb is among the sweetest of names and carries a perfume in the mention. Lamb is a test of character. Anyone who has not Lamb in his (or her) heart is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils.

JOSEPH ROSENBLUM
Greensboro, North Carolina

In her otherwise very moving essay on Charles Lamb, Philonoë flatly informs her readers that "during Melville's nineteen years as a customs inspector, he wrote absolutely nothing of note." I would humbly but firmly disagree. Herman Melville became a customs inspector in December of 1866. For the next nine years he toiled painstakingly over his eighteen-thousand-line poem *Clarel,* which was published on June 3, 1876.

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One of the longest poems in the English language, *Clarel* stands as Melville's last and most comprehensive elaboration on the nature of religious belief, a crucial theme for him. That the poem stands largely neglected does not, I think, merit the view that it is not "of note." This is, in fact, the very point Philonoë makes on behalf of Charles Lamb. Melville would, perhaps, relish the irony.

WILLIAM POTTER
Staten Island, New York

In her Summer 1998 column, Philonoë frets that her favorite Lamb, aka Elia, may become Hardly Anybody's Lamb. Not to worry. As long as there are crossword puzzles, there will always be a place for a four-letter word that has only one consonant and three vowels, not to mention that the word is one of those relatively rare ones that solves puzzle-makers' problems by ending with an "a."

HERVIE HAUFLER
Grantham, New Hampshire

LISTENING TO A TIDEPOOL

I read Geerat J. Vermeij's essay with great interest. I suspect we all accumulate fantasies of André's with whom we would like to have dinner. I hope Professor Vermeij won't mind if I add him to my personal list.

I grew up on the beaches of California from San Diego to the Mendocino coast, but mostly around Carmel, where I spent many hours staring into tide pools and listening to the waves and winds and gulls. I am now a commercial plant breeder. I read this essay with a sense of excitement: there are people who observe with more than just their eyes! Vermeij's approach will give me something more to think about as I wander through a seed field.

CARROLL G. BRIGGS
San Juan Bautista, California

MATTHEW ARNOLD AND T. S. ELIOT

Adam Kirsch's essay "Matthew Arnold and T. S. Eliot" is challenging, even provocative. It made me think. I had often wondered about the popularity of T. S. Eliot with university professors, as he never was a favorite of mine.

Kirsch mentions Eliot's critique of Arnold's essay on Wordsworth. Could it be possible that T. S. Eliot misinterpreted, either deliberately or because he did not know, Arnold's "poetry is at bottom a criticism of life"? Actually, the whole statement is needed for interpretation: "It is important, therefore, to hold fast to this: that poetry is at bottom a criticism of life; that the greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life,—to the question: How to live."

I disagree with Eliot's definition of *bottom*, as it also means "the fundamental character, essence, reality"; "the base." Poetry would then be the base or foundation of the criticism of life. That seems to fit better with both Arnold's and Wordsworth's *words*. I would prefer the definition of criticism as "the art of estimating the qualities and character of life as artistic work."

You have mentioned Eliot's fatal flaw: egotism. Eliot appears to have had an inability to see meaning in other than his own prescribed definition. His definition of the line reveals either his own ignorance of vocabulary or his deliberate attempt to defile Arnold, and thus Wordsworth.

I would disagree that "Arnold's temperateness is a sign of spiritual shallowness." Much of the nineteenth century reflected a questioning of religious faith. Arnold was far from alone in his beliefs. That dichotomy between formalized, often fundamental, religion and individual faith continues. Not accepting formalized religion and its symbols does not mean a lack of depth of faith.

When Arnold talks about charlatanism in "The Study of Poetry," he reminds me of the atmosphere surrounding fundamentalism and catholicism. The term *charlatan* does seem to fit Eliot. As he said in "Prufrock": "There will be time, there will be time / To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet." There was, for me, always a pretentiousness and arrogance about Eliot. It would be these qualities that would put the reader off his poetry—unless, that is, the reader also related to those qualities.

Thank you for this essay. It enabled me to understand better my dislike of T. S. Eliot's work.

SALLY ANN HELF
Dalzell, South Carolina

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BEING MUGGED

Catharine R. Stimpson says that if she had the power, she would require that the man who mugged her "as an act of contrition . . . perform grunt work in either the pediatric or geriatric wing of a hospital . . . until a jury of those whom he was serving concluded that he would be less likely to mug someone than to come to the aid of someone who had been mugged." This statement cries out for critical examination.

Do hospitalized children and old people want to be used as a penance and a character-building learning aid? Do they want a criminal among them, even one who "would be tautly supervised so that he could do no harm"? As a former child and future old person, I would not want this. I would feel exploited. And I wonder why Stimpson is singling out sick children and old people for this character-building function. Does she see them as especially pathetic and inspirational? Has she thought about whether they see themselves that way?

"Gray-haired lady. Real target of opportunity." It looks as if it's not only muggers who think that way. It also looks as though the "lessons" Stimpson has learned about "how erratically 'normal' people treat the 'abnormal'" may not really have been "permanent."

FELICIA ACKERMAN
Professor of Philosophy
Brown University

Catharine R. Stimpson replies: Given my respect for Felicia Ackerman, I was not surprised that she asked interesting questions about my essay. Her letter also showed yet again how complicated issues of revenge, retribution, and rehabilitation are. However, it is possible that petty criminals could do useful work—for example, swabbing hospital floors—that would not entail the exploitation of the unwilling and the helpless.

EXTRAPOLATING SHAKESPEARE

J. C. Furnas has, of course, the nonagenarian scholar's privilege of preferring, with Hazlitt, the theater of the mind, but his sweeping denigration of "Shakespearean gimmickry" ignores the ways in which the plays have been kept vital for audiences. A director's decision to experiment may not only free a play from a stifling Bardolatrous embrace but also liberate the actors from the elevated delivery that once passed for authentic style and enable them to discover the passion and wit of the language. Richard Monette's 1920s *Much Ado About Nothing* at this season's Stratford (Ontario) Festival and Michael Bogdanov's eclectic staging of the history plays for the English Shakespeare Company a few years ago are but two examples of productions that, far from being a "frenetic infection," have made Shakespeare a living presence. Whether Shakespeare "had little respect for the trade of play-carpenter" cannot be proved, but one suspects that his ghost would be pleased that his plays continue to afford so much delight in the theater.

RAYMOND G. MCCALL
Professor Emeritus of English and Theatre
The College of Wooster, Ohio

J. C. Furnas replies: I welcome the elegant temperance of Professor McCall's disapproval. Let me assure him that America's cult of Shakespearean gimmickry is continuing merrily to boil and bubble even overseas. I am too hardened, however, not to be "shocked, shocked" when the *New York Times* of August 23, 1998, tells me that in, of all places, Casablanca, Dar America, the American cultural center, will soon stage *Stuff As Dreams Are Made On,* a one-man adaptation of *The Tempest* by a University of Texas drama professor.

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The Podium

Dying Young

BERNARD KNOX

As our section was moving back, I felt a burning pain through my neck and right shoulder and fell to the ground on my back, with blood spurting up like a fountain. My friend John came back with David, an Oxford man who had been a medical student. I heard David say, "I can't do anything about that," and John bent down and said, "God bless you, Bernard." They had to go; they had to set up the gun and cover the withdrawal of our other crew.

I have since then read many accounts by people who, like me, were sure they were dying but survived. Many of them speak of a feeling of heavenly peace, others of visions of angels welcoming them to Heaven. I had no such feelings or visions. I was consumed with rage—furious, violent rage. I was just twenty-one and had barely begun living my life. Why should I have to die? I cursed God and the world and everyone in it as the darkness fell.

Many years later, when I returned to the study of the ancient classics, I found that my reaction was not abnormal. In the *Iliad,* still the greatest of all war books, this is how young men die. Hector, for example, "went winging down to the House of Death / wailing his fate, leaving his manhood far behind, his young and supple strength." And Virgil's Turnus goes the same road: *Vitaque cum gemitu fugit indignata sub umbras:* His life with a groan fled angry to the shades below. *Indignata. Quia iuvenis erat,* the great Virgilian commentator Servius explained: Angry. Because he was young.

—on being wounded in 1936 as an International Brigade volunteer in the Spanish Civil War, from the First Annual Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archive's Bill Susman Lecture at New York University's King Juan Carlos I of Spain Center, April 25, 1998

Bernard Knox is the former director of the Center for Hellenic Studies in Washington, D.C. His books include *The Oldest Dead White Males* and *Essays Ancient and Modern.*

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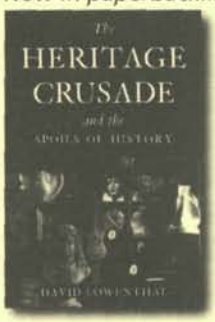

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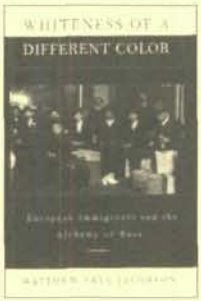

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